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PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro

PREVIEWED

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT [PS2/XB/GC]

METROID PRIME: ECHOES OF DARKNESS [GC]

FAR CRY INSTINCTS [PS2/XB]

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PREVIEW

MGS3: SNAKE EATER

Konami shows that it hasn't gone soft

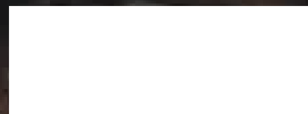
Prince of Persia 2

The sequel that's full of Eastern promise

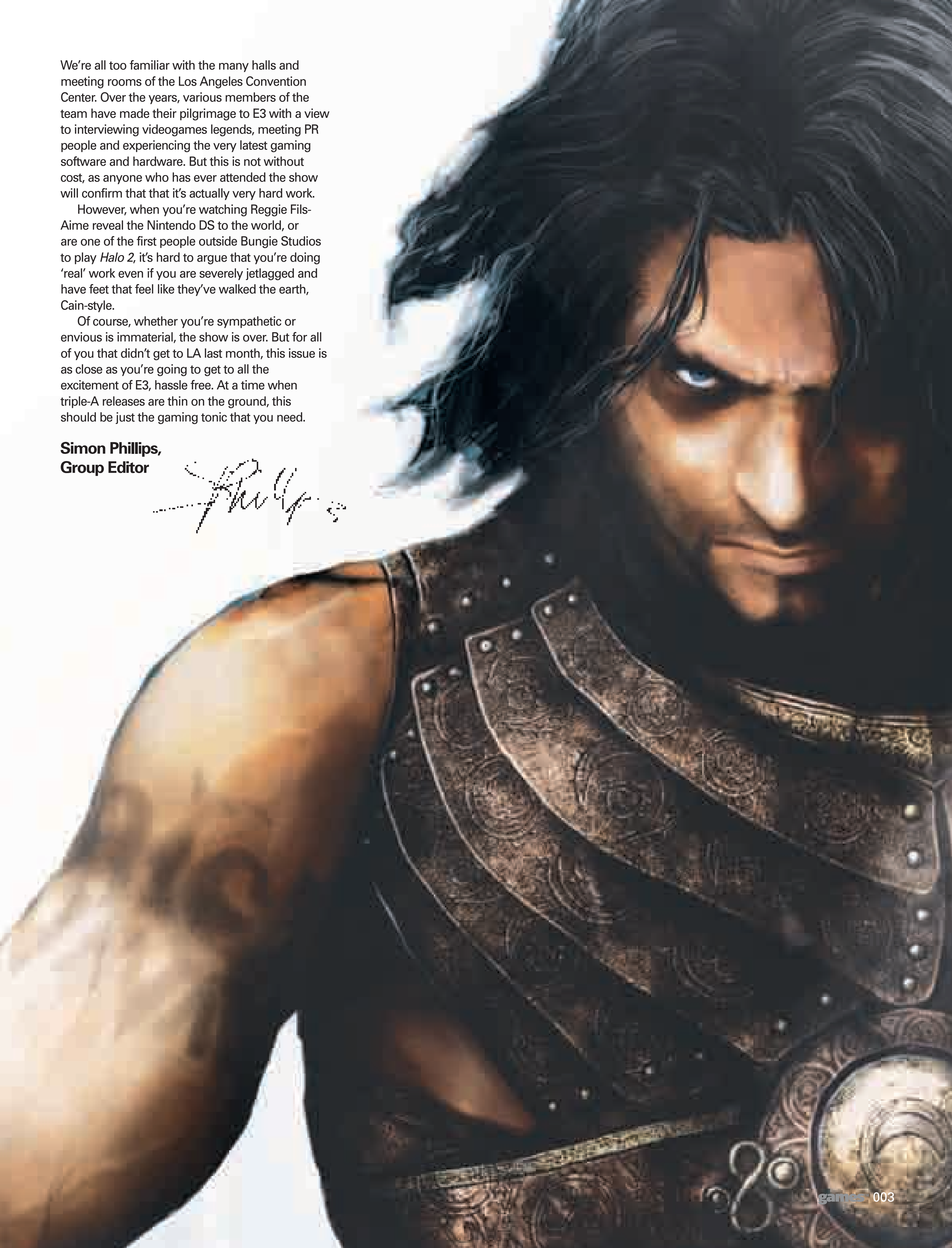
HARDWARE

DS Vs PSP

Can Sony take down Nintendo's pocket monster?




eMag

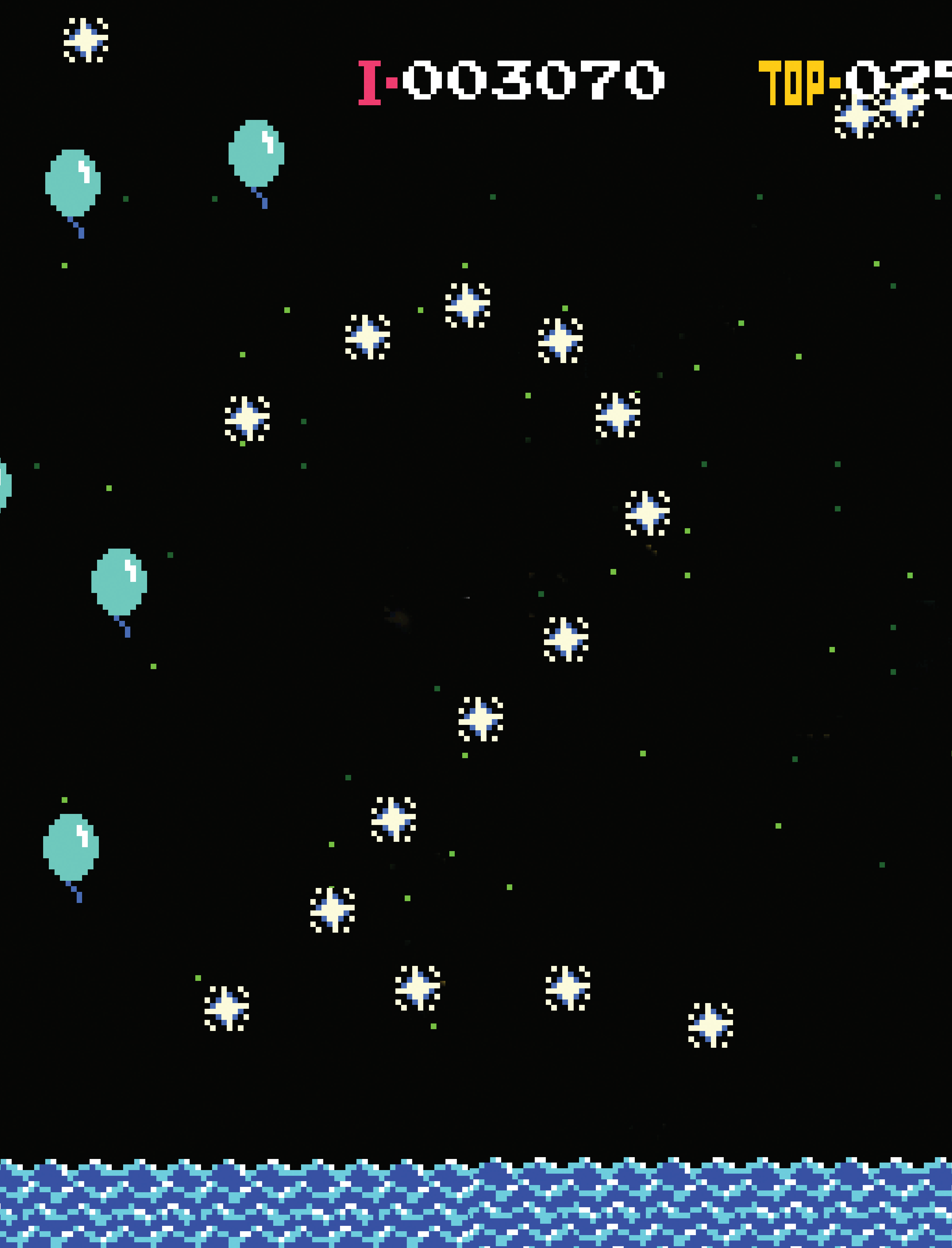


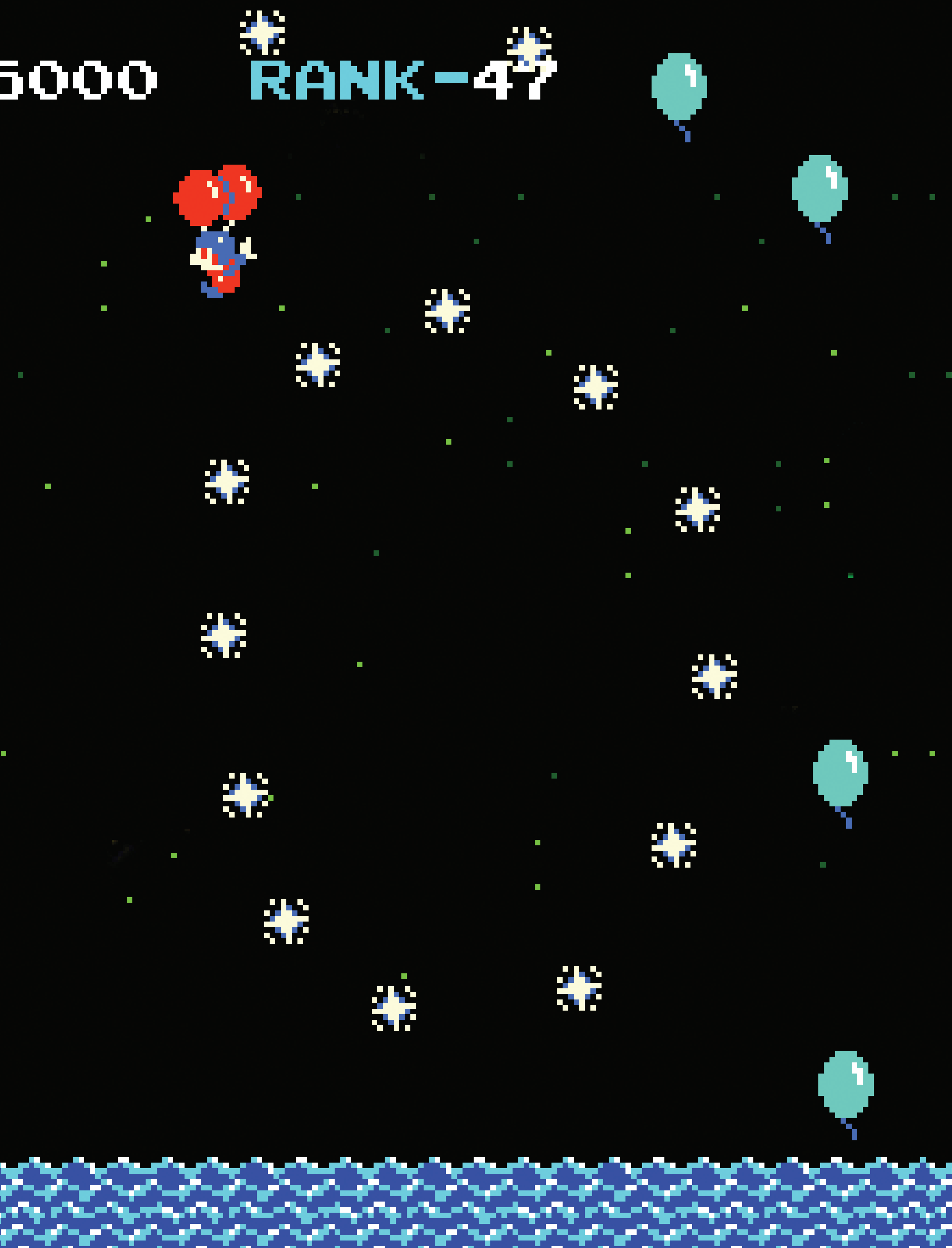
We're all too familiar with the many halls and meeting rooms of the Los Angeles Convention Center. Over the years, various members of the team have made their pilgrimage to E3 with a view to interviewing videogames legends, meeting PR people and experiencing the very latest gaming software and hardware. But this is not without cost, as anyone who has ever attended the show will confirm that that it's actually very hard work.

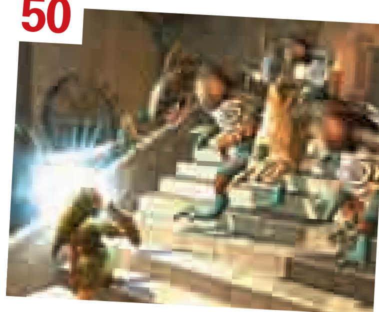
However, when you're watching Reggie Fils-Aime reveal the Nintendo DS to the world, or are one of the first people outside Bungie Studios to play *Halo 2*, it's hard to argue that you're doing 'real' work even if you are severely jetlagged and have feet that feel like they've walked the earth, Cain-style.

Of course, whether you're sympathetic or envious is immaterial, the show is over. But for all of you that didn't get to LA last month, this issue is as close as you're going to get to all the excitement of E3, hassle free. At a time when triple-A releases are thin on the ground, this should be just the gaming tonic that you need.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor


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TOP


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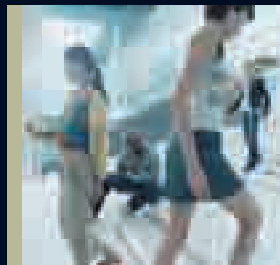
REGULARS

RETRO

Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords

064 Can the best Star Wars videogame get any better? Early footage suggests it can and it will…

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

POCKET CHANGE

E3 USHERS IN THE NEXT WAVE OF PORTABLE CONSOLES



It'll come as no surprise to hear that two of the major draws at this year's E3 were the new handhelds from Nintendo and Sony. Both on show in playable form (albeit an unfinalised unit from Nintendo), the PSP and DS were always going to take centre stage, but visitors came away with mixed feelings. The DS, while interesting, didn't come across as the ground-breaking innovation it could be, and Sony really didn't reveal enough about the PSP to make any mistakes. Letting gamers loose with prototypes and tech demos is a great idea in theory, but in practice the 'eye candy' approach seemed to work much better.

Sony's approach was as showy as you might have predicted. Plenty of pretty people cavorting with the unit was enough to make it a must-have before people even saw what it could do, and the stunning videos of what were claimed to be in-game visuals (it's too early to tell in most cases) only served to emphasise the necessity of owning one. Counter-balancing this were the full specs put out by Sony, giving the more technically minded among us a valuable insight into just what the machine will be capable of. (Strangely, Nintendo wasn't so forthcoming with the DS's specs; it's stranger still when you consider that the twin-screened system is supposed to launch before the PSP.)

Sony has a good nine months before the PSP's European release with which to build on an impressive first showing. Indeed, its press release leaves this in no doubt, with SCEI proclaiming that it "intends to aggressively promote PSP and UMD as the new handheld entertainment platform for the coming era."

Nintendo saw fit to unleash bungling Steve Ballmer wannabe Reggie Fils-Aime upon the masses with his no-nonsense approach. "My name is Reggie. I'm about kicking ass, I'm about taking names, and we're about making games," he proclaimed. Such was the impact of Nintendo of America's VP of sales and marketing that fan websites sprung up almost instantly. Somewhat ironically, then, it was the much-mocked Reggie who best summed up Nintendo's view of the DS. "While others plan to let you go a little faster down the same roads you have always travelled, Nintendo plans to take you down incredible avenues you've never seen before," he explained. "We understand the handheld market better than anyone else, and Nintendo DS paves a new path of originality and success."

Ultimately, pitting the two consoles against each other on anything above a technical level is pointless. The two are aimed at different markets, and while the multimedia PSP will no doubt find a place alongside iPods and PDAs, the DS goes down the usual Nintendo of route innovative handheld gaming. Will they live together happily ever after?

"WE UNDERSTAND THE HANDHELD MARKET BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE, AND NINTENDO DS PAVES A NEW PATH OF ORIGINALITY AND SUCCESS"

REGGIE FILS-AIME, VP SALES AND MARKETING, NINTENDO OF AMERICA



Kutaragi-san thinks the UMD format will be a hit.



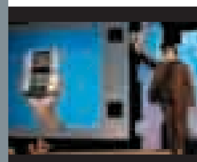
Connectivity with other Sony kit is in the pipeline.

SONY PSP

ALL-SINGING, ALL-DANCING… ALL CONQUERING?

Sony did a great job of convincing us that the PSP will be an essential purchase – there was plenty to look at even if playable code was scarce. Playing up the 'stylish accessory' angle as opposed to the 'handheld console' route, there was no way anyone could resist the lure of the pretty powerhouse. Battery life is a big concern so it's no surprise that Sony was showing off all manner of peripherals such as external battery packs, carry cases and GPS add-ons. Gamers were not let down by the titles on offer either, although there have been some interesting changes in direction. *Metal Gear Acid* was the star oddity, dropping Solid Snake into a slow-paced, card-based universe, but news of *Gran Turismo 4, Winning Eleven* and support from EA and Square was enough to keep the crowd happy.



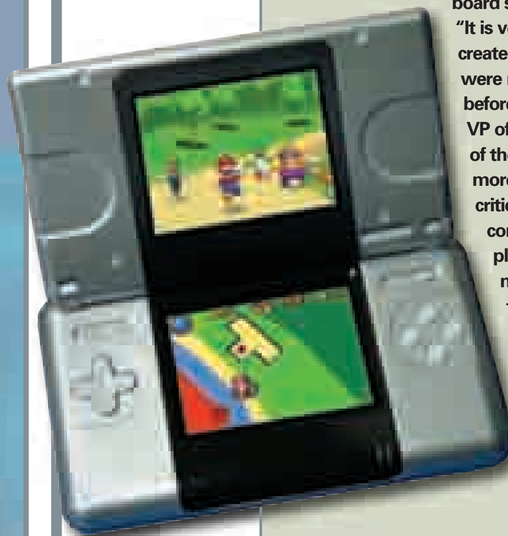


Iwata-san's DS was an unfinished model.

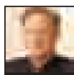
NINTENDO DS

INNOVATING, IMITATING AND IRRITATING IN EQUAL MEASURE

The response to Nintendo's DS is best described as 'mixed'. Punters were free to try out a range of titles, including *Metroid Prime Hunters* and *Super Mario 64x4*, and some tech demos, many of which showed off the potential of the hardware better, we'd hazard, than its launch line-up will. But while the DS may not have the backing of as many high-profile developers as the PSP, those that are on board seem most enthusiastic. "It is very nice that we can create games using DS that were not even possible before," said Yoichi Haraguchi, VP of Namco. However, many of the titles shown had little more than novelty value and criticisms of the stylus control method were as plentiful as the pleas for new *Pokémon* or *Zelda* titles on the handheld. But with everything shown being works in progress, there's plenty of time for Nintendo to prove its critics wrong.



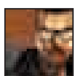
Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



NOT SO CHEAP AS CHIPS

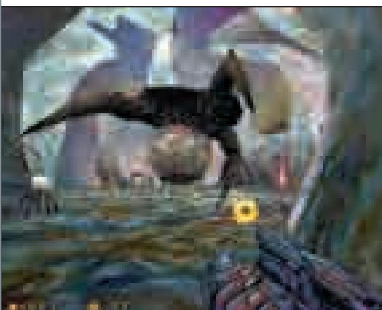
With the Xbox outselling the PlayStation2 in the US for the first time, it's no surprise that SCEA announced a PS2 price drop to $149 at E3. However, a similar reduction has been rejected by SCEE for the European market – at least, for the time being. SCEE president David Reeves has dismissed claims that Europe will see a discount, despite the threat posed by Microsoft's success. However, the possibility of the PS2 being reduced to the 'magic' price of €129 (at which the PSone saw much of its growth) hasn't been ruled out.





THERE'S LIFE IN IT YET

While *Half-Life 2* might still be top of PC gamers' wish lists, there's news afoot concerning the original game and its team-based spin-off, *Counter-Strike*. According to Valve founder Gabe Newell, remakes of both games using the *Half-Life 2* engine are in development and should be released around the same time that the sequel hits the shelves. With concerns over whether Valve will release the remakes as free downloads or full-price titles, this could be the biggest cash-in ever.







ECTS drew big names last year, but where are they now?





Bennett – thinks EGN will rule the UK trade show scene.

MAY THE BEST SHOW WIN

LONDON HOSTS SIMULTANEOUS TRADE EVENTS – BUT CAN THERE BE ONLY ONE?

With the dust from E3 now settled, all eyes in the European games industry are turning towards London where, every year, everyone gets a second bite of the exhibition cherry thanks to the likes of the Electronic and Computer Trade Show (ECTS). This year, however, two competing events threaten to split industry loyalty, and while the argument that competition is healthy might hold water for some, making publishers and developers decide between the two could be doing more harm than good.

As it stands, the three days from 1-3 September will see two exhibitions running simultaneously – ECTS 2004, based at Earl's Court for the third year running, and the European Games Network (EGN), a new event backed by industry governing body the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers' Association (ELSPA) held at ExCeL in London's Docklands. While both are similarly styled trade shows, it is ELSPA's event that appears to have the upper hand at the moment.

EGN will run in tandem with the public Game Stars Live event, which, combined with Sony's decision not to hold a PlayStation Experience at ECTS, has affected most companies' decision about which show to attend. Not only that, but the recent announcement of a developer conference backed by the Independent Games Developers' Association (TIGA) at EGN to rival the Game Developers' Conference Europe at ECTS appears to be yet another nail in the older show's coffin.

Roger Bennett, director general of ELSPA, believes that EGN will be the definitive UK gaming event. "We believed the time was right for us, as representative of all games publishers based in UK, to encourage the industry as a whole to become masters of their own events and activities, so that all revenues produced can be ploughed back into the industry, rather than satisfying the interests of non-games-industry shareholder interests," he says. "The industry can sustain only one major annual consumer/trade event in UK, and with the support of our board, ELSPA members and the independent developers body, TIGA, EGN will be it."

Compared to last year's ECTS, which proved the show could still draw big names



This year's ECTS won't have the support of the PlayStation Experience, while EGN will incorporate Game Stars Live which should prove to a be a big draw for the gaming public.



> "ECTS IS ABOUT REPRESENTING EVERY SECTOR OF THE INDUSTRY – IT'S AN ESTABLISHED EVENT IN A SUPERIOR LOCATION WITH A DIVERSE EXHIBITOR LIST"
>
> ANDY LANE, PORTFOLIO DIRECTOR, CMP INFORMATION





like Nintendo and Electronic Arts, ECTS 2004 seems to be losing ground to ELSPA's event at an alarming pace. Yet despite a lack of key exhibitors (specifically big publishers with past experience of the show) and the emergence of rumours that Nvidia is about to pull out, ECTS organiser CMP Information is confident that things aren't that bleak. "With over 5,000 visitors already confirmed, ECTS already has momentum," says Andy Lane, portfolio director at CMP Information. "ECTS has always been about representing every element of the interactive entertainment world, not just publishers. Our current exhibitors are as diverse as ever, and there are a number of initiatives planned that will ensure that ECTS has relevance for every sector of the industry."

Of course, there are already those within the industry who have made up their minds as to which exhibition is going to be the most successful, although the more reserved know that judgement can't be made until the events – both still over two months away – have been and gone. Unfortunately, what is clear right now is that the outcome, whoever the victor (if there can be such a thing), is going to be messy – whether it's ELSPA or CMP that ends up with egg on its face come the morning of 4 September, someone's pride will be seriously dented.

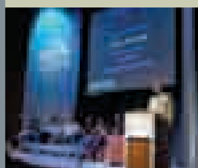
Even worse, such industry-wide humiliation won't improve the way that shows such as this are organised, instead only providing a moral and political victory for whichever exhibition comes out on top. At a time when the industry should be celebrating its successes rather than squabbling over who gets custody of various exhibitors at events, a united front is what's best for everyone. Hopefully, this year's conflict will prove to be the last.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

ECTS and EGN aren't the only shows vying for our attention in the coming months. The second Edinburgh International Games Festival (EIGF) takes place on 11-14 August, right in the middle of the two-week long gaming event called Go Play Games. While the public will have the opportunity to experience the latest games and attend gaming masterclasses, industry types will be sitting through numerous debates and conferences outlining the future of the industry. On the international front, there's also the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany from 19-22 August and the Tokyo Games Show in Japan from 24-26 September. With all these shows, how will we get to play any games?



EIGF was a hit last year, so will be even bigger in 2004.





SEGA SAMMY STORY

AND THUS THE SAGA ENDS…

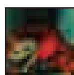
Yes, it's yet another development in the long-running SEGA and Sammy merger story, the pantomime saga that just keeps on giving. Fortunately, this will be the last twist in the tale, as Sammy Corp has announced it will buy the remaining 78 per cent share of SEGA's stock in a deal worth ¥165 billion (£824 million), giving it total ownership of SEGA's shares.

The merger between the two companies was initially proposed for early 2003 until SEGA got cold feet and pulled out, resulting in several SEGA senior executives handing in their notice. Despite this, rumours of a deal persisted, and last December Sammy bought a 22 per cent stake in SEGA. The current deal will see Sammy president Hajime Satomi take charge of a new holding company that will buy up the remaining shares in SEGA and all the Sammy shares.

This deal will give Sammy a springboard to expand outside Japan, where it is currently the largest supplier of pachinko machines. More importantly, Sammy will want to fuse SEGA's development talent and IP with its Atomiswave arcade system. Coupled with SEGA's announcement at the end of March that its net income had more than doubled, mainly thanks to the company's arcade business, this comes as rare good news for the struggling arcade division. So is it a happy ending for all?



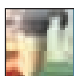
Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DEATH BECOMES THEM

The star of the first game announced for the PSP – Death Jr. – is set for success outside the realm of consoles. Having already set out its plans to use the licence in other media, Backbone Entertainment has inked a deal for a comic (which is well into development) and even a movie with Circle Of Confusion, a production company owned by Sony Pictures. Telling the story of Death Jr. (the teenage son of the Grim Reaper) and his friends Pandora and Stigmartha, production is set to run alongside development of the game, due for the PSP's launch.





SEGA IS THE ONE

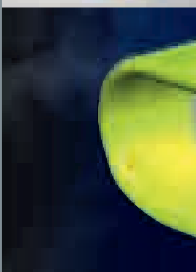
SEGA is now set to co-publish Monolith's widely-anticipated MMORPG *The Matrix Online*. It's not terribly surprising, but is still good news for SEGA. "We're thrilled to join Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment to provide gamers around the world an opportunity to participate in the authentic and continuously evolving world of *The Matrix*," said Hideaki Irie, president and COO of SEGA America. Under the agreement, SEGA will handle worldwide distribution of the game, while WBIE will oversee content development and the running of the online operations.



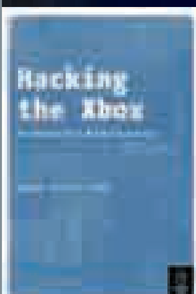


The screen will be detachable, for more control.

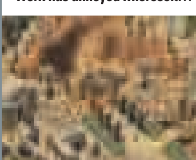


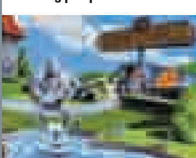


'bunnie' Huang's previous work has annoyed Microsoft…



The Eve should be an enticing prospect for retro fans.





COMING FROM THE REAR



YET ANOTHER HANDHELD CONTENDER ENTERS THE FRAY

The GBA, N-Gage, Zodiac, GP32, DS, PSP… and now this. As if the handheld market wasn't crowded enough, San Diego-based Ministry Of Mobile Affairs is working on its own ambitious portable project. Effectively a handheld PC, the Eve makes similar boasts to Infinium's Phantom that it will run existing PC software as well as many other programs and functions.

Running Windows XP as standard and offering such PC staples as USB ports and Compact Flash compatibility as well as a few more original ideas (a removable screen section for portable media and an S-Video output for connection to a TV) the Eve could outdo its rivals in terms of compatibility and power. A 20Gb hard drive sets off the package nicely, and, like GamePark's GP32, MOMA's handheld will play existing PC titles, but we expect emulation to be more of a pull to the less legally-minded punter.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about MOMA is that it is headed by Nikki Justis and her boyfriend, Andrew 'bunnie' Huang, author of famed under-the-radar journal *Hacking The Xbox: An Introduction To Reverse Engineering*. Huang's illicit electronics proved his capabilities as a master of technology, and he is confident that the Eve will be a popular showcase for his talents. "Eve is ideal for enthusiasts, commuters and retrogamers [as it's] capable of playing a wide variety of PC titles out of the box," he says. "I like to think of it as an iPod for your PC game library. iPods add value to your existing music collection by letting you go mobile; Eve does the same for your game collection."

But where will the Eve sit alongside the current and forthcoming handhelds? It's nearest rival is perhaps the GP32, although Huang is keen to make the Eve unique. "We're looking more to create a new market, actually," he says. "Going up against the big guns is tough; building a million units is not within the realm of a small company. We're also orthogonal to the Zodiac and PDA market, since Eve has not got support for PDA-like functions (touch-screen and so on)."

Although the Eve won't have the marketing budgets of the big handhelds, Huang hopes that developer interest will lure punters. "I welcome any developer to come and play with the hardware, and repurpose the console for any creative applications," he says. "The console is fairly priced for the hardware you get, so any applications that drive demand is good for us."

We're not sure that we'll be able to walk into Woollies and pick an Eve off the shelf when it's released, but then who would have thought Nintendo would be re-releasing the Game and Watch? Anything's possible…

GEORGE LUCAS HAND PICKS SUCCESSOR FOR STAR WARS FRANCHISE HOLDER

NEW BLOOD AT TROUBLED LUCASARTS

S*tar Wars* licence-holder LucasArts has finally appointed a new president, bringing LucasFilm marketing boss Jim Ward into the hot seat. The news has hardly come hot on the heels of previous president Simon Jeffery stepping down, and in its seven-month search for the ideal replacement LucasArts also had to fend off criticism for its lethargic response to Jeffery's departure.

Nevertheless, it was George Lucas who selected Jeffery's successor and Ward's first task will be ensuring *Star Wars Battlefront* meets its release date of 21 September to coincide with the DVD release of the original film trilogy. "It's clear there is enormous potential for synergy between visual effects, videogames licensing, and film and television production," said Ward. "I'm looking forward to exploring how to integrate them into the current and emerging interactive entertainment markets, where so many possibilities exist."

Disappointing Christmas sales, redundancies in April and the cancellation of titles such as *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* have marked disappointing times for LucasArts. Thankfully, with Ward's appointment following the confirmation of a sequel to the softco's surprise hit *Knights Of The Old Republic*, it seems the publisher is finally turning the corner.


LucasArts can always rely on the licensed Force.


Sam and Max, alas, won't be hitting the road any more.

games™ >> THE TOP FIVE

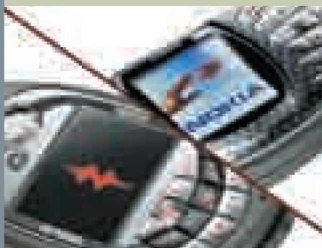
CONSOLE MAKEOVERS


No.5 GAME BOY ADVANCE
The SP is so much nicer


No.4 MEGA DRIVE
Smaller is definitely better


No.3 LYNX
It didn't help it sell, though


No.2 PLAYSTATION
Mmm, Apple-esque curves


No.1 N-GAGE
We're still not convinced



INFINIUM LABS FINALLY REVEALS PHANTOM SPECS

FREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

When Infinium Labs first touted its Phantom console to the world, many believed it to be an elaborate smoke-and-mirrors act, especially given the lack of confirmed information on the hardware. At E3, however, the Phantom was finally unveiled, putting the hoax doubts to rest and also challenging the console and PC status quo with an original concept.

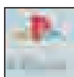
The Phantom isn't being pushed as a traditional gaming platform per se, as it doesn't fall into any particular hardware pigeonhole. For example, the controller will merge both keyboard and mouse, so it's possible to balance the peripheral on your lap, combining standard PC interfaces with console accessibility. The hardware itself won't offer any ports for external media such as CDs or DVDs, as games will be downloaded through broadband and stored on an internal 40Gb hard drive. The Phantom is powered by an AMN Athlon 2500+ processor and Nvidia GeForce FX 5700 graphics chipset, specifications placing it just behind current cutting-edge PC technology.

Then there's the price; to download games, you'll need to subscribe to the Phantom Gaming Service. Sign up for a two-year subscription and the hardware and controllers are free of charge, along with an initial library of free games. The subscription rates have yet to be confirmed, although it will be expected to cost about $30 (approximately £17) a month. The hardware will also allow gamers to play multiplayer titles against those playing on normal PCs, opening up interesting possibilities for massively multiplayer online role-playing games. Phantom will launch in November this year. Perhaps…



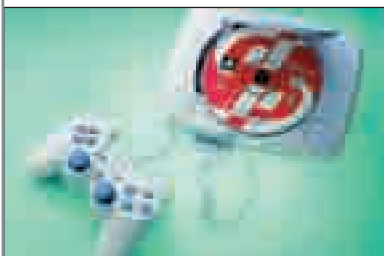
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THANKS A (100) MILLION

What were you doing on 18 May? In a success that Sony is claiming to be the first of its kind in console history, that was the day that the PSone reached a worldwide shipment total of over 100 million units. Now sold in over 120 countries and regions around the world – and with over 7,300 games in its back catalogue – the success of the console will be sealed in the annals of history when it reaches its tenth birthday this December. And while we're talking shipped units rather than sold ones, it's an impressive figure nonetheless.

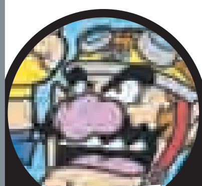




BROADER BANDS FOR ALL

With online gaming becoming more popular every day, BT has announced that it will step up its proliferation strategy and make sure that almost every home in the UK (99.6 per cent, to be exact) will be able to access broadband by this time next year. Currently, homes are only eligible for broadband connection if their local exchange has been upgraded to ADSL; however, a rollout of ADSL broadband to a further 1,128 exchanges in the UK will mean that less than one per cent of homes around the country will be unable to use broadband. Good news for online gamers everywhere…





SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

Looks like Mario's evil twin Wario isn't all bad – he's a true English gentleman at heart, in the form of dapper scoundrel Terry-Thomas. Ding dong.





EA FINALLY SIGNS UP TO XBOX LIVE

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

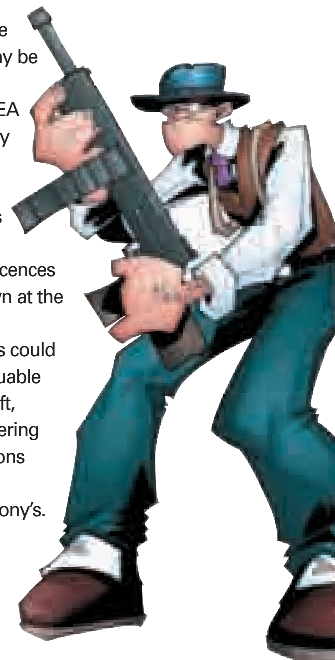
The worst-kept gaming secret since the Rare buyout was finally made official at E3, when Electronic Arts announced that it was signing up to Xbox Live. The next wave of EA titles will fully support the Live service; online play is a dead cert for most games but whether the firm will provide downloadable content and support for the Live 3.0 updates (such as clans) has not been confirmed.

"We don't feel as though we've been forced into anything – we made this decision on our own," EA chief executive Larry Probst told industry website gamesindustry.biz. "It's a good decision for EA and a good decision for the consumer. It just took longer than it may have done otherwise." Probst acknowledged that negotiations with Microsoft took some time, but says this means the service will be even better. "In the end that's what's important – providing as satisfying a consumer experience as we can," he said.

So what can we expect to be playing online in the near future? The picks of the bunch so far are EA's recent acquisitions *Burnout 3* and *TimeSplitters 3*, which will both sport at least online play, but further Live integration (à la *PGR2*) would be nothing short of a miracle. In addition, you can expect the full *EA Sports 2005* range to boast the same online experience that PS2 owners have enjoyed this year, a move spearheaded by chart favourites *FIFA* and *Need For Speed* which will now find their way into even more homes.

EA's Live announcement came days after Microsoft revealed that its XSN Sports titles would not receive the expected annual updates – the possibility that the two decisions may be linked is being played down by EA but there's no way that Microsoft would want to put rival products up against the money-printing licences that will be thrown at the Live service.

Either way, this could prove to be a valuable asset for Microsoft, especially considering its online operations are much better organised than Sony's.



DOUBLE TROUBLE



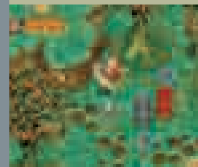
MICROSOFT DENIES RARE DS DALLIANCE

Microsoft has gone on record to state that Rare will definitely not be developing titles for Nintendo's new DS handheld. The UK-based developer was rumoured to have taken delivery of DS development kits and to have begun work on several undisclosed titles. But while it may not seem wise for Microsoft to allow its costly investment to court old flame Nintendo, there would be good reasons for it to do so.

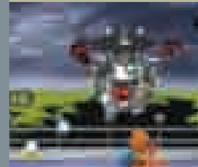


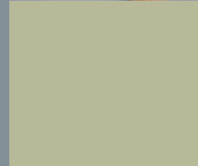
Like its GBA support, DS software would mean extra income for Rare – and therefore Microsoft— from a market into which it has no intention of moving. This would alleviate the problem of Rare's infrequent releases by interspersing key titles like *Kameo* and *Conker: Live And Reloaded* with some income. The more titles it can produce (provided they are of sufficiently high quality), the easier it will be to keep public and industry alike on its side.

Furthermore, Microsoft would clearly throw anything it can into the path of the PSP, and if that entails luring punters to the DS with Rare franchises then it would make good business sense to form this otherwise unholy alliance. Apparently not, though…



Catch Rare on the GBA, but certainly not the DS…









EPIC UNLEASHES UNREAL ENGINE 3

FUTURE PERFECT

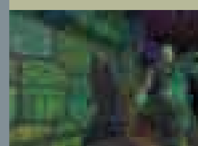
It may be a few years before machines that can do it justice are commonplace, but Epic Games chose to launch its next-generation technology at this year's E3. With many high-profile games like *Splinter Cell*, *Rainbow Six 3* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* all calling on the current wave of *Unreal* technology to some extent, it's incredible to see how much of a leap forward *Unreal* Engine 3 is; supporting high-spec PC software and next-generation console games, this is up there with Microsoft's XNA showing in terms of giving us a tantalising glimpse of the future.

A quick flick through the specs of this new engine (which you can find in full at www.unrealtechnology.com) reveals that developers using it will have much of their job done for them – complex physics routines, high-end lighting and shadowing techniques and even net code and sound are all laid on. Best of all is the integration of these many impressive elements, and Epic is making the same kind of claims that Sony did with the PS2's Emotion Engine before its release – only this time with some evidence to back it up.

Material properties such as flammability, destructibility and friction are all taken into account, and with character-based intricacies like motion tracking and health-relative animations all included as well, we're expecting to see a lot of this engine in a couple of years' time.



If this looked any nicer we'd eat our hats. All of them.









GAMES ROOM 101

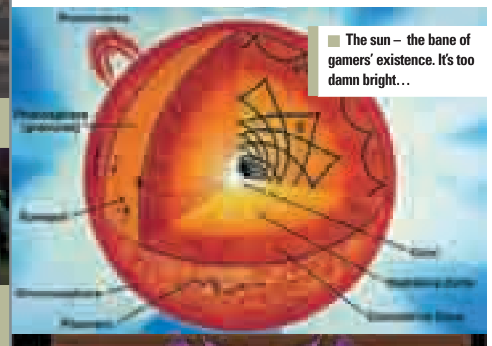
THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO.20: STAYING IN FOR THE SUMMER

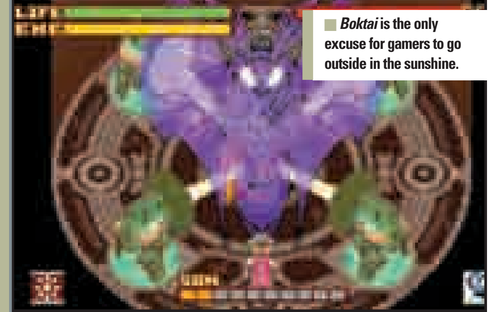
Okay, so the fact that summer is here isn't really a complaint that we can level at the games industry – although, obviously, there's more than enough evidence for us to moan about a lack of quality titles released during the period. However, the thing that bothers us most about the sunniest months of the year isn't so much the shortage of games, but anyone who doesn't understand why we'd want to be indoors when the sun is shining.

While the prospect of being outside isn't particularly abhorrent, there are still times when we'd rather be sat in front indoors playing games, regardless of whether it's a 'nice day' on the other side of the curtains. That wanting to enjoy our pastime during such weather is an unfathomable concept to some annoys us – just because the sun is out, that doesn't mean you have to go outside. And if we do ever decide to go outdoors (after much cajoling, we might add), don't be surprised if we come equipped with a GBA.

Gamers might not be the vampiric types that some people believe them to be, but the fact is that summer isn't an excuse to stop playing games – as soon as non-gamers realise that, maybe they'll give us a break.



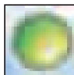
The sun – the bane of gamers' existence. It's too damn bright…



Boktai is the only excuse for gamers to go outside in the sunshine.

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Feel sorry for the poor soul who pitched up on eBay and placed a bid on what looked, at first glance, like the bargain of a lifetime – a limited edition Crystal Xbox with a starting bid of only a penny. Of course, if he'd have looked closer at the description he would have seen that the lot was, in fact, only the empty box, described by the seller as "the must-have accessory for gamers". The vendor also recommended using the box to convince friends you owned a see-through Xbox. Sadly, that didn't stop the bidding reaching £115 for some folded cardboard. Proof that people without much experience of eBay should make sure they know what they're buying before they click that mouse.





A console with texting abilities? So it's an N-Gage?

SOFTWARE GIANT AWAITS MICROSOFT'S NEXT MOVE

SQUARE ENIX TO PLAY WITH MICROSOFT?

Square Enix's president has hinted that the Japanese publisher could become a developer for Microsoft's next console, claiming that the hardware successor to Xbox "would fully deserve consideration". The reason behind this turnaround is what Yoichi Wada refers to as an "evolution of thinking" at Microsoft, and the softco president is delighted that the US hardware giant sees the future in online gaming. "Xbox pursued network gaming and that is a fine idea," Wada-san told US gaming website Gamespot.

Microsoft would presumably be happy to accommodate Square Enix, as the developer also put its faith in online gaming with *Final Fantasy XI*, and has a wealth of IP such as *Dragon Quest* and *Kingdom Hearts*.

Despite his praise, however, Wada feels Microsoft's networking ideas are very different to Square Enix's online plans. "[Microsoft's] attempt was to create a closed network in a closed environment – that is completely contrary to our concept of networked business," Wada-san said.

He also explained why his company has not worked with the Xbox. "When you look at the Xbox from the standpoint of a standalone game console it's not different from the PS2," he said. "But when you look at it from the installed base perspective, there is a big difference." So while Xbox 2 may host a *Final Fantasy* title, we still won't see one on the current-generation machine.

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Nintendo's Saturo Iwata confirms that the company's next console will be more than just a bunch of technical stats:

"Better technology is not enough – today's consoles already offer [near] photorealistic experiences, so simply beefing up those graphics will not make a difference"

gamesTM says: Try telling that to most of the market. A lot of people will always think better graphics mean better games – the same people who think Nintendo games are for kids. If only they knew better…

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

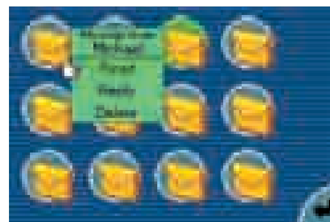
WIRELESS MESSENGER AND MULTIPLAYER PERIPHERALS ANNOUNCED

GBA GETS TEXT APPEAL

If you've ever wanted to impose your text lexicon on fellow GBA owners under the thinly veiled cloak of irony, Majesco has the answer. Released in the US, the Wireless Messenger will allow GBA owners to chat in real time or text other users of the device.

A keyboard interface appears on screen when using the peripheral, and messages are stored even when it's not plugged into your GBA. The price has yet to be confirmed but there aren't going to be monthly fees or surplus charges, as it uses free radio signals to send data. The absence of extra costs is important, as the success of the Wireless Messenger will rely on sales, given its dependency on other units.

The wireless link works via a small device that plugs into the back of your GBA and caters for up to four players in multiplayer games. Three groups of players can play independently while in range of each other, so the gadget should work as well as a standard link cable. The peripheral works with the regular GBA and SP, but we're still awaiting word on a European release.



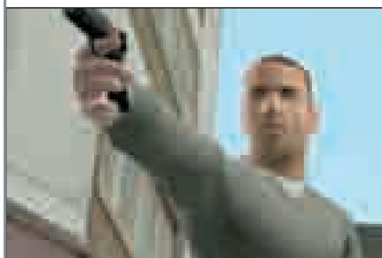
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GETAWAY TO THE MOVIES

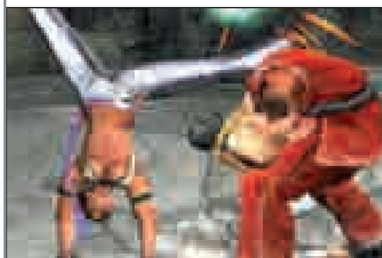
The trend for bringing videogame franchises to the big screen is gathering pace thanks to the Cannes Film Festival announcement that Sony Pictures is developing a film based on *The Getaway*. Although originally rumoured to be in production early in 2003 (and set for release this year), last month's confirmation suggests that a release date isn't likely until at least 2005, some time after this year's November shelf-date for the latest instalment of the PS2 series, *The Getaway: Black Monday* (previewed on page 54). Details on casting and plot are expected in the coming months.





GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

The games industry might be relatively young, but it boasts a few old-timers – like *Pac-Man* creator Namco. The Nakamura Corporation was founded in 1955 (becoming Namco in 1977) with its main focus being fairground rides. Having designed a commemorative logo to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary next year, Namco plans to use it on all its campaigns over the period, which are expected to include the launch of *Ridge Racer* for the PSP and *Tekken 5*.



Mobile game of the month



ANCIENT TOWER OF SARUN

Anyone who's ever played the Hewson classic *Nebulas* will instantly be at home with this game. You must guide your Ninja up a tower (which nicely rotates as you walk around it) in search of nine pieces of a magical scroll that will help restore balance to the world. While the gameplay is fairly basic, it's boosted by some decent visuals and a selection of devious enemies. *Ancient Tower Of Sarun* is a very enjoyable diversion and is well worth downloading; just don't ask us how to complete the last tower…

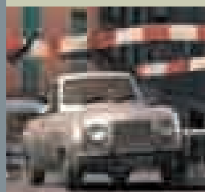
THE ROUGH WITH THE SMOOTH

GOOD NEWS AND BAD FOR THE FINNISH GAMING DEVICE

Nokia's N-Gage received a boost when Atari and Capcom announced on the eve of E3 that they will develop games for the phone-cum-console. While Capcom wouldn't divulge what games it has planned, Atari confirmed both *Driv3r* and *Civilization*. This news means that Nokia can reasonably expect at least 50 games to be available for the N-Gage by the end of the year. Ilkka Raiskinen, senior vice president of Nokia's Entertainment and Media Business Unit, said: "We want to bring existing franchises to the N-Gage and add unique features to them but we also want to take risks and innovate."

Sadly, new research claims the N-Gage is playing to two different audiences without attracting either. Nitesh Patel, senior industry analyst at Strategy Analytics, believes casual gamers are unwilling to pay over the odds for the N-Gage, as they're more likely to be satisfied with cheap java games. Meanwhile the small screen is a turn-off for gamers, and mobile phone users will be deterred by the design. This is old news to Nokia, of course, but these findings will have spoiled the party.





Driv3r – coming to a non-sidetalking N-Gage soon.

GAMING YOUNG LOVE SAMSUNG

PHONE COMPANY IS TOP FOR MOBILE-GAMING YOUTH

Samsung has the most credibility among young mobile phone users, according to recent research. As the number of gaming mobile phone users is predicted to reach eight million by 2007, Samsung plans to boost its favourable image among 18-30 year olds by offering content and games aimed at that market. It will also aggressively target young mobile phone users by sponsoring gaming, music and extreme sports events.

Samsung has already tried to corner the youth mobile market by creating Team Radioshack to appear in THQ's *AMA Supercross Series* and becoming the featured handset provider for Disney Mobile. The firm also aims to introduce technology for the youth market, with 3D gaming, touch-screen capabilities and two-megapixel cameras all planned for future phones.

Peter Skarzynski, senior vice president of Samsung's wireless terminals division, revealed the secret of the firm's success. "Samsung introduces non-traditional gamers to the mobile content phenomenon by embedding advanced games, vibrant graphics and robust audio effects in a device they understand and feel comfortable with," he said.



FROM FARMING IN AFRICA TO PRODUCING ONE OF LAST YEAR'S MOST CELEBRATED VIDEOGAMES, YANNIS MALLAT'S BACKGROUND SHOWS HE ISN'T YOUR TYPICAL INDUSTRY FIGURE. BUT THEN PRINCE OF PERSIA ISN'T A TYPICAL FRANCHISE…

“IN SANDS OF TIME YOU PRESSED BUTTONS AND ENJOYED LOOKING AT WHAT THE PRINCE DID – BUT YOU WERE NOT DOING IT YOURSELF. IT WAS COOL, BUT IT WAS NOT THAT HARDCORE”

YANNIS MALLAT

YANNIS MALLAT

UBISOFT MONTREAL

You’d be forgiven for thinking that Ubisoft Montreal should be taking it easy. Practically every game the studio releases is a hit, and last year’s *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* is still collecting awards. Most developers might see it as a wise time to start churning out carbon-copy sequels, but Yannis Mallat – executive producer of the *Prince Of Persia* series – thinks otherwise…

Mallat’s first love has always been games, though his background is perhaps a little unusual. After working on farming projects in Africa for several years he decided he needed a change so he moved to Quebec, studied for an MBA then joined Ubisoft in 2000, where he worked on the *Rayman* franchise and was producer on *Sands Of Time*. Maybe it’s his fairly recent arrival in the industry that’s enabled him to look at such an established franchise in a fresh light. Whatever the reason, however, it’s clear that there will be big changes for the provisionally titled *Prince Of Persia 2*. Mallat has decided to rework the game’s engine, combat and tone, while drastically altering the narrative to make for a more ‘mature’ experience. “We’re doing it for a couple of reasons,” Mallat explains, “and they are two good reasons. The first one is that while the Prince was cool last time, he was not outstanding, and we wanted to convey much more attitude. The second is coming from the market.” This may be a cause for concern among some gamers, particularly fans of the original rotoscoped game, who don’t want a hero with ‘attitude’. Additionally, the last *Prince Of Persia* title didn’t sell very well. But rather than consciously strive for a larger audience, it seems Mallat’s design brief this time around views his past triumph as a tech demo of the elements that will be fully developed for *Prince Of Persia 2*.

He openly criticises the combat in the first game (“repetitive and boring… it was sequential… travel and fight, travel and fight”), and dislikes the superficial implementation of the time powers, but also stresses that with the next game these elements will be “totally embedded” in the gameplay. Does it help to be so harsh on a product that was embraced so emphatically by a cynical industry? “Yes, it’s always good to be critical, because what is ‘good’ will stay ‘good’ and be kept. Now we want to focus on what needs to be enhanced. So I see a good bunch of flaws, in my opinion.”

As a result, Mallat is happy to reel off an extensive list of things he didn’t like in the first game – returning to words like ‘immersive’, and earnestly discussing “the philosophy” of the game’s development. *Prince Of Persia*’s sophisticated combat system comes under attack again, too. “The main word is ‘depth’. In *Sands Of Time*, there was a bunch of enemies sharing the same AI, so it looks a little redundant,” he sighs. “Now you’ll be in a room and you’ll see a scripted event – an enemy fighting one of your allies, for example – and when the fight is over, and the enemy has won, then he can attack you. So from a scripted event, that guy is becoming an interactive character and it is totally immersive.”

This philosophy also extends to introducing a larger range of enemies, including giant armoured beasts, glimpsed in the developer’s E3 demo reel. “We have taken care to have different types of enemy with their own AI. Human-like enemies, big enemies… Different enemies require a different approach to gameplay, and in that sense you are breaking down the repetitiveness of the game.” Mallat has also admitted that *POP2* will feature more varied bosses in an effort to elicit some dynamic responses from gamers. “In *Sands Of Time* you pressed buttons and enjoyed looking at what the Prince did – but you were not doing it yourself,” he explains. “It was cool, but it was not that hardcore. In the new combat system, you keep the same philosophy and the same astonishing moves, but this time you are controlling them.”

Control. It’s a word we imagine stencilled in ten-foot-tall letters on the wall of Ubisoft’s Montreal studios, and Mallat seems determined to find a way to bottle it for the licence’s core audience. And after delivering such an all-conquering first chapter it will be no small feat to satisfy gamers a second time. Even if we get the impression he’s unlikely to satisfy himself…



Prince Of Persia 2 is in development, and is previewed on page 46.

The Laptop Of Luxury

HANDHELD CONSOLES ARE FINE, BUT GAMERS LOOKING TO TAKE MORE SERIOUS ACTIVITY ON THE ROAD NEED TO ENTER THE WORLD OF PORTABLE NOTEBOOKS

If you're like us, chances are you find yourself filling every spare moment with as much gaming as possible. Of course, daily life can often affect what you get to play – for example, if you need to travel a lot, you'll find your gaming restricted to handheld consoles. However, with technology becoming smaller, lighter and more powerful, it seems only right that we should consider the possibility of being able to play 'bigger' games on the move. But to do that you'll need the right hardware.

Going Places

Thankfully, portable notebooks and laptops are becoming more of an economic reality – where once you were looking at over £3,000 for something close to the specs of a desktop PC, today's machines are much more affordable. As such, the opportunities for gaming on the move are far broader; and why have a clunky desktop PC at home and a small but slow portable for travel when you can have the best of both worlds in one machine?

We've rounded up some of the best units at a range of prices, and if you can justify the outlay, it's well worth it in the long run.

TRIED AND TESTED

ADVENT 7046



- Online Price: approx. £1,049
- Supplier: Advent
- Web: www.adventcomputers.co.uk

Advent is a name you can generally trust in the PC market thanks to its reliability and flexible approach to customising any unit to suit your needs. With the 7046, it has attempted to offer a machine that supports much of the power necessary for a gaming PC, but at a reduced size and a fraction of the cost of its rivals. And what's more, it succeeds… for the most part, anyway.

BEST ALL ROUNDER

Despite the low price, the 7046's specifications are fairly robust – the built-in Nvidia graphics chip might only support 64Mb of memory, but a Pentium 4 processor running at over 3GHz makes up for this. What's more, the TFT screen – admittedly only a standard 15-inch – can reach an impressive maximum resolution of 1400 x 1050, although it does occasionally present some problems with ghosting when put to the test against some fast-moving action.

Other plus points have to be the machine's size (it only weighs 3.4kg, which makes it the lightest of the machines shown here) and the fact that it creates very little heat on the underside, making it comfortable for long-term lap-top use. The multiformat DVD writer is a bonus for the price, as are the additional USB ports and integral modem (great for online gaming fans). With a little more under the hood than Sony's PCG-K115B (see over), the 7046 is a worthy choice if you want to combine work with gaming.

"THE 7046 HAS MUCH OF THE POWER OF A GAMING PC BUT IS SMALLER AND CHEAPER"

"IT'S HARD TO FIND FAULT WITH THE ROCK XTREME IF YOU WANT SUPREME GAMING"

ROCK XTREME

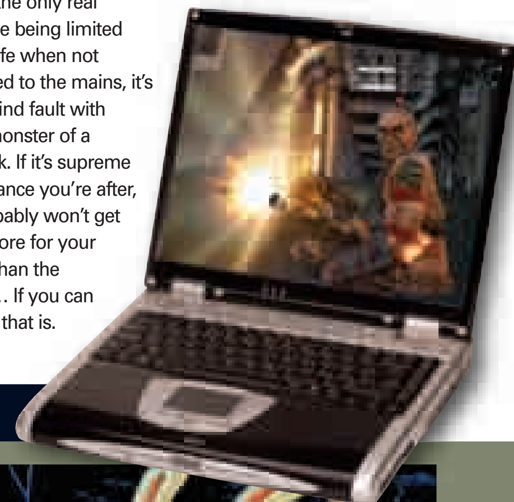
MONEY TO BURN

- Online Price: approx. £1,960
- Supplier: Rock
- Web: www.rockdirect.com

Yes, you've read correctly – Rock's latest notebook costs just under £2,000, putting it right at the edge of what most would consider spending on such a machine. However, there is a reason for the high price because if ever a notebook could be branded a beast, it would have to be the Xtreme. With more essential power packed inside the tiny casing than we've seen in most other machines, we have to admit to being incredibly impressed.

Admittedly, the unit doesn't look like anything special – the option to have your case in metallic green, red or 'bad boy' black is nice, but hardly vital. However, turn the Xtreme on and it's a different story. Sporting a hefty 3.2GHz processor, 1Gb RAM and a 60Gb hard drive it's at the top of the class as far as raw power goes, but the built-in 128Mb graphics chip from ATi really is the icing on the cake. Needless to say, even some of the more demanding titles around today run without much of a problem and, naturally, there's going to be plenty more to come in the near future.

With the only real downside being limited battery life when not connected to the mains, it's hard to find fault with Rock's monster of a notebook. If it's supreme performance you're after, you probably won't get much more for your money than the Xtreme… If you can afford it, that is.



PERFECTLY PORTABLE

GREAT NOTEBOOK GAMES FOR ALL BUDGETS



What better game could there be to pass the time during those long train or plane journeys than *The Sims*? It might not look particularly great by today's standards, but that doesn't make it any less of an enjoyable or addictive game.



The Fool And His Money (Cliff Johnson's follow-up to epic über-puzzle game *The Fool's Errand*) has slipped back to an October release, but the intense mix of brain-bending puzzles and conundrums will be ideal if you want to lose hours at a time.



An absolute must – the unofficial SCUMM emulator (found at www.scummvm.org) is perfect for getting all those old-school LucasArts adventures working on modern PCs. As long as you've still got the original discs, you can play them to your heart's content.

SONY PCG-K115B

- Online Price: approx. £903
- Supplier: Sony
- Web: www.sony.com



BEST BUDGET BUY

Despite never really having the power for more complex use, Sony's VAIO range has always appealed to those who like their notebooks to have style *and* substance – they've always looked the business. Now, though, Sony appears to be addressing the more important issue of capability, and with the impressively priced PCG-K115B it seems to have taken a step in the right direction.

Admittedly, the base specs for the machine don't seem that mind-blowing – particularly as it uses Celeron's budget P4 processor running at 2.8GHz and only has a 64Mb ATi graphics chip – but then you have to consider that at just under £1,000, Sony's notebook compares favourably with other machines with similar specs. While you certainly won't be playing the likes of *Half-Life 2* or *Doom 3*, it has more than enough power to support games from as recent as six months ago and can maintain a decent rate on something as new as *Painkiller*.

What makes the PCG-K115B more appealing is the package as a whole. Fitted with all the usual connections – including two USB ports, which allow for easy joypad use – and a DVD writer, there's also a Sony Memory Card slot that's handy if you own other Sony kit such as a digital camera. Combine all this with a varied software bundle and the PCG-K115B is a very interesting, if slightly underpowered prospect.

"SONY'S VAIO RANGE HAS ALWAYS APPEALED TO THOSE WHO LIKE LAPTOPS WITH STYLE AND ABILITY"

"WITHOUT A DOUBT, TOSHIBA'S S-203 IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL NOTEBOOKS WE'VE SEEN FOR A WHILE"

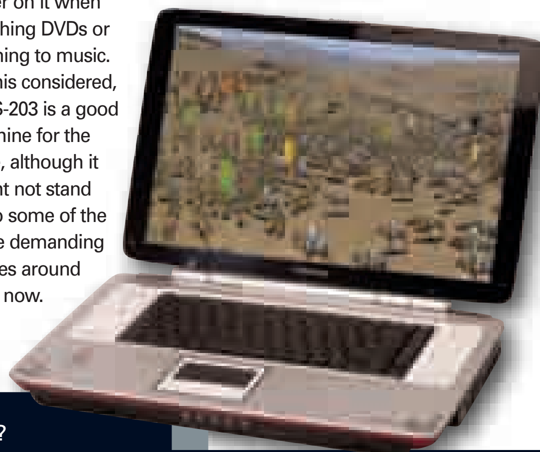
TOSHIBA P20 S-203

BEST FOR STYLE

- Online Price: approx. £1,499
- Supplier: Toshiba
- Web: www.toshiba.co.uk

Gone are the days of Toshiba's clunky Satellite Pros, and in their place come notebooks like the S-203; an attractive unit that not only has the necessary goods inside, but comes at a relatively decent price too. The S-203 is one of the more beautiful notebooks we've seen – with its metallic red body and glossy black edging, it certainly looks the business. Thankfully, it also delivers when it comes to performance. While we might have hoped for a little more than a bog-standard Nvidia 5200 graphics chip (sadly, the most basic model around), the Pentium processor's 3.2GHz clockspeed and huge 80Gb hard drive manage to impress. The same goes for the 17-inch widescreen display, which is suitably crisp and has a decent resolution to boot.

Of course, the thing that really allows you to show off is the S-203's functionality as a portable media centre. Not only does it come with high-quality harmon/kardon speakers for crystal-clear playback, but the tiny remote control that comes packaged with the unit means you don't even have to lay a finger on it when watching DVDs or listening to music. All this considered, the S-203 is a good machine for the price, although it might not stand up to some of the more demanding games around right now.



FACTS AND FIGURES SO WHAT EXACTLY WILL YOU GET FOR YOUR MONEY?

As well as the usual benchmarking software that we use to test PC hardware (BAPCo's SysMark 2002, in case you're interested), we put each of our notebooks to the test with a number of titles across several genres. The key was to push each machine to its limit, while not limiting ourselves to games that were guaranteed to run; as such, everything from *Painkiller* and *Max Payne 2* to less action-oriented titles such as *Rise Of Nations* and *Medieval: Total War* were tried. The results speak for themselves – if the machines hadn't have passed, they wouldn't have made the cut.

Name:	SONY PCG-K115B	ADVENT 7046	ROCK XTREME	TOSHIBA P20 S-203
Processor:	Celeron M 2.8GHz	P4 3.06GHz	P4 3.2GHz	P4 3.2GHz
RAM:	512Mb	512Mb	1Gb	512Mb
HDD:	40Gb	40Gb	60Gb	80Gb
Graphics:	ATi IGP (shared memory)	Nvidia Go 5300 64Mb	ATi Mobility 9600 128Mb	Nvidia Go 5200 64Mb
Display:	15" TFT	15" TFT	15" TFT	17" TFT Widescreen
Optical Drive:	CD-RW/DVD-ROM	DVD+/-RW	DVD-RW	DVD-RW
Connections:	3x USB2, Firewire, VGA, TV-out, LAN, Parallel	4x USB2, Firewire, VGA, TV-out, LAN, Parallel	4x USB2, Firewire, VGA, TV-out, GB LAN, Parallel	4x USB2, Firewire, VGA, TV-out, LAN, Parallel
Extras:	Memory Stick slot	Built-in modem	Independent CD player	Remote-control function
Weight:	3.5kg	3.4kg	3.7kg	4.5kg
Dimensions:	42 x 277.5 x 329mm	43 x 275 x 326mm	44 x 290 x 329mm	47 x 293 x 419mm

LIKE YOUR NOTEBOOKS A LITTLE MORE STYLISH THAN MOST? THEN MAYBE YOU SHOULD CONSIDER GETTING YOURSELF A DIFFERENT FORMAT ENTIRELY…

THE **APPLE** OF OUR EYE



Just because the majority of laptops (particularly those with gaming capabilities) happen to be PCs, that doesn't mean they're the only choice. Whether it's out of necessity for work or a simple preference for style and performance, Apple's selection of notebooks (in the PowerBook and iBook ranges) are proving more and more popular in today's market. There's certainly no doubt that Apple's machines (and, in particular, the pure white iBook) are probably the most aesthetically pleasing computers ever seen, but with recent changes to the architecture of the G4 line, they've also been moved up a step in the opinion of the gaming community.

Previously, the iBook range (which is cheaper than the PowerBook series) just didn't have the processing power to cut it in the gaming world; while emulating older systems didn't pose any problems, running newer Mac-specific games was a bit of a no-go. Now, though, Apple has increased the power of its current G4 line of iBook notebooks to a fairly meaty 1.2GHz PowerPC processor and thus opened the door to gaming enthusiasts everywhere. Before you jump in to tell us that 1.2GHz isn't exactly fast compared to current PC standards, it's worth pointing out that comparing the two formats isn't as easy as it sounds.

While PCs are generally marketed on their clockspeed alone, Macintosh computers are far more complex beasts that take all kinds of architectural aspects into account; while the raw numbers might seem like they put Apple's machines way behind the PC competition, the actual performance is a lot closer than you might imagine. Naturally, this is good news for Mac users, particularly those partial to a bit of gaming in between using their notebooks for more serious purposes.

With the iBook range starting at just £799 for a basic model, and the more powerful PowerBooks starting at £1,149 (not to mention games becoming more widely available from a range of internet-based stores), it looks as though Apple's time in the sun is just beginning.

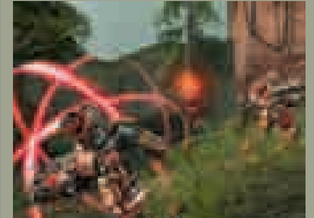
"THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT APPLE'S MACHINES ARE SOME OF THE MOST AESTHETICALLY PLEASING COMPUTERS THE WORLD HAS SEEN"



BIG MAC AND GAMES

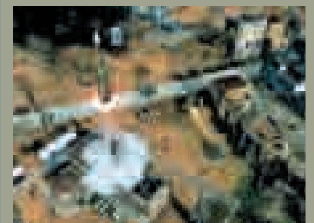
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Having stormed the PC market, the latest in the *UT* series is available for the Mac for effortless laptop fragging sessions.



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

Strategy games are often seen as the staple of the PC, so it's no surprise that the new instalment of the *C&C* franchise is out for Mac too



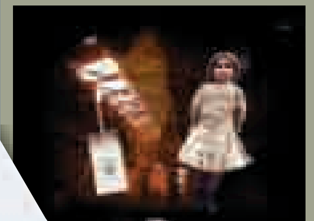
TRON 2.0

Monolith's take on the classic movie franchise is an interesting experience. With its distinctive graphical style and familiar FPS gameplay, this is hard not to enjoy.



IN MEMORIAM

As eerie as it is taxing, Ubisoft's under-rated *Se7en*-style puzzler is great if you like a scare. However, you do need to be connected to the internet while playing most of it.





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"I WISHED TO PLAY GOD, YES, BUT A BENEVOLENT (RATHER I BUILD A HAPPY PLACE FOR MY LITTLE SUBJECTS WHERE I COULD

This month, I installed a new Mac when my beloved, weary iMac would accommodate no further pictures of Waka Inoue. One can only toy with the latest versions of Photoshop and Word briefly before attention travels elsewhere, into domains less productive. First port of call, nabbing *Shaun Of The Dead* off FastTrack – I'm not waiting for a possible September US release, Pegg, no blinking way. Rest assured, though, you will still get my money at least twice, via the eventual cinematic release and following DVD. Nice job, too. Not as fast or as dense as *Spaced*, but great fun. I don't make a habit of downloading movies and, unlike these technochavs with a hubcap in the front garden and a PC chock full of *Van Helsing* and *The Mummy Returns*, it is not a replacement for cinema tickets or retail videos. Next, focus gravitated to that last surviving games genre that computers handle inarguably better than consoles: the god game. This distraction would cost me more than a few hours.

During the research phase, I was given the opportunity to observe a friend of mine playing his copy of *Total Annihilation*, by way of a demonstration. The manner in which he did this was so telling, so confirmatory – so god damned American – that I decided at once to take the experience and repeat it here, unfairly forcing a generalisation upon an entire people. Talk about shock and awe; anything that could be done to make this as one-sided and unfair as possible, he did. Easy difficulty, yes. Infinite funds, yes. Nuclear capability, yes. Reveal whole map from the start, yes. Thirty minutes later and the poignant sight of a massive, technically superior Western army overwhelming an ill-prepared Middle-Eastern desert force looked more like last year's CNN than anything I wanted to play. Next!

I pressed on by myself, auditioning RTS heavyweight *Age Of Empires II Gold* and unfeasibly admired, turn-based behemoth *Civilization III*. In each case it was refreshing to engage in the kind of micromanagement minutia that falls so effortlessly beneath the mouse and keyboard, choosing, adjusting, directing. Something didn't fit, though. Whether it's the current global situation – a dirty war driving each minute of coverage from every American news source – or just me getting old, the taste for combat wasn't there.

I wished to play god, yes, but a benevolent (rather than vengeful) one. Why couldn't I build a happy place for my little subjects, a place where my job would be making everything nice for them rather than amassing them for inevitable bloody conflict? Fast forward to one week later: *SimCity 4* had cut its one gigabyte slice of my virginal new hard drive and, well, the **games™** editorial crew were awaiting yet another overdue column thanks to one more digital addiction. My violence quota is filled between terraforming and colonising by short bursts on *Red Dead Revolver*. There's nothing like shooting a bandito in the throat for a quick bloodshed fix.

Inoue-san – very good for the soul but oh-so-tough on one's hard drive.


Courtesy iStockphoto.com

THAN VENGEFUL) ONE. WHY COULDN'T MAKE EVERYTHING NICE FOR THEM?"

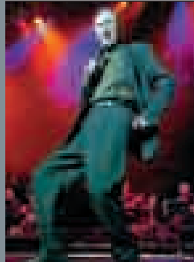
By way of a sweet 'and finally…' type story, the loveliest tale in American gaming this month came not from colossal marketing push E3, but the Make A Wish Foundation. You know them – they're the people that help very sick kids meet Metallica or ride in a fighter jet. Nine-year-old Ben Duskin, an avid gamer suffering from leukaemia, wanted nothing more than a videogame in which he could travel through his body, destroying the malignant cells causing his illness. A San Francisco branch of the Foundation scouted around local developers that might make Ben's wish come true, and struck gold when Eric Johnston of LucasArts came forward.

Meeting with Ben all the way through production to shape the game exactly as he had visualised it, Eric spent months on the project. Today, the game's out, it's free, and Ben is very much in remission. *Ben's Game*, as it's simply known, features a young hero hovering through the immune system on a surfboard, battling bad cells and monster bosses to collect shield tokens which protect against leukaemia's effects. Ben hopes kids in his position will use the software therapeutically during treatment. But you don't have to be sick to play it. If, by chance, you've got a nice new Mac, you can download it from www.makewish.org/ben and try it out.

Many thanks The Shape

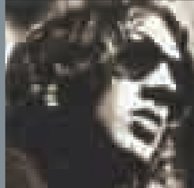
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Michael Barrymore scandals

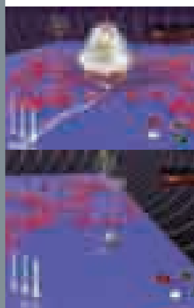


LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

No Richard Ashcroft



Ben's Game – like *Innerspace*, but different.

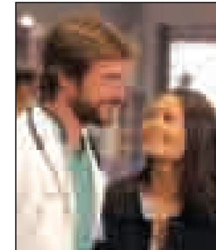


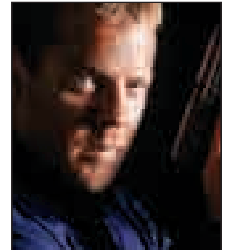
WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

SWEEPS





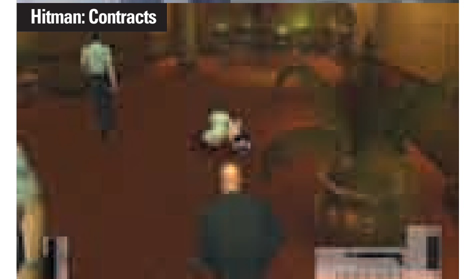
TV ad rates for the year are set by audience numbers taken during one small period. The networks go nuts trying to drum up the most possible viewers. The reason the *Friends* finale, last *Frasier*, *American Idol* final, conclusion of *24*, *ER* and more occur at once is to hike the audience during this cross-network measurement, or 'sweeps'.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar	Multi
2	Van Helsing	Vivendi	Multi
3	Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Multi
4	NBA Ballers	Midway	Multi
5	Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	SCEA	PS2
6	Transformers	Atari	PS2
7	All-Star Baseball 2005	Acclaim	Multi
8	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Multi
9	Fight Night 2004	EA Sports	Multi
10	Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	Multi

(Updated 24/5/04)


Red Dead Revolver


Hitman: Contracts

games™ JAPAN REPORT



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL IS VOLLEYBALL RUMBLE ROSES IS THAT GAME WITHOUT THE



The pretence of sporting endeavour has been lost… Mostly.

At the request of my good friend Hideo Kojima, I squeezed plane-ticket money out of my thin wallet and found my way from Tokyo to E3 in Los Angeles. After two days of allowing my stomach to adjust to milk and cheese, I met Kojima-san moments after the opening of E3. He was tired. His eyes were drooping. He either hadn't slept the night before, or he was hung over.

He showed me around the Konami booth, where the Three Most Insane Games Of All Time were on display; *Nano Breakers*, *Neo Contra* and *Rumble Roses*. One of those is a blood-filled hack-and-slash game by Koji Igarashi, producer of *Castlevania*. One of those is an overhead run-and-shoot in which one boss dances on helicopter blades, chomping a cigar. The third is a wrestling game starring women in bikinis. It even has a mud-wrestling mode. I asked Kojima, roughly, "What the hell is this?" His reply was a smirking, "Ain't it awesome?" Kojima was at his most honest that morning, and *Rumble Roses* is gaming at its most honest.

Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball is volleyball played by girls in bikinis; *Rumble Roses*, with characters designed by the same team, is that game without the ball or the net. Surprisingly, it's a good game, put together by Yukes, a respectable developer of wrestling titles. "You want a story – you get Tomonobu Itagaki around to play this game," Kojima advised me. Itagaki is the producer of the *Dead Or Alive* games and a real rock-star of a man. I heeded Kojima's advice, and sought out Itagaki. What ensued was an adventure. It was kind of a boring adventure, and that's a shame – not all adventures can be interesting.

I found Itagaki reclining on a metal chair at a table near the Tecmo booth. He was watching his own company's games' trailers, dressed in a snakeskin jacket and my exact pair of Edwin jeans. We even have the same hairdo. He was wearing sunglasses, however, because he's that much cooler than me. Intent on freaking him out, I pulled out a chair and sat next to him. "ITAGAKI TOMONOBU!" I screeched. He cocked his head, sipped his coffee, and proclaimed: "Yes." "GEEMU PRODYUUUSAA!" His answer, again, was, "Yes." "THE WORLD'S STRONGEST!" I said, holding up two fists. He sipped more coffee. "Yes."

He asked for a business card. Seeing it said I was a 'novelist' he became interested. "I will keep this," he said. He then stared at me. Soon, he asked: "Why did you leave Japan? Why did you come here?" He motioned at the Los Angeles Convention Center's ceiling with one ring-studded hand. "Did you come here for this?" My answer was weak: "I… guess." He shook his head. "The women in this country don't understand men," he

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON TWENTY: MEETING ITAGAKI-SAN

Naze Nihon wo detanoka? Naze… koko ni kitanoka?	Why did you leave Japan? Why did you come… here?
… *kore* no tame ni kitanoka?	Did you come here for… *this*?
Kono kuni no onna wa otoko no koto wakaranaiyo. Zenzen wakaranai.	The women in this country don't understand men. They don't understand them one bit.
Nihon ni kaetta houga ii yo. Ashita kaetta houga ii yo. Ashita ka asatte.	You'd better go back to Japan. Go back tomorrow. Or the day after tomorrow.
Kedo, ore no shigoto…	My, uh, my job…
Omae no shigoto wa nandemoneeyo!	Your job is NOTHING!

PLAYED BY GIRLS IN BIKINIS. VOLLEYBALL OR THE NET"

said. "They don't understand men one bit." He pointed a finger at me. "You need to go back to Japan. Go back tomorrow – or the day after tomorrow." We then had a staring contest. It took maybe 45 seconds. He won, because of his sunglasses. I put my hands on the table and pushed away. He said, calmly, as I stood up: "I'm going back to Japan in two days." He shook my hand. "Come see us when you're in Tokyo." In the end, it was him who'd freaked me out. I never even got to ask him about *Rumble Roses*….

I remember now that *Rumble Roses* offers a choice to watch a match between computer-controlled opponents. You choose Exhibition Mud Match or Exhibition Regular Match, and then you choose one-player, two players, or Watch. Now I understand the full weight of what Kojima said when he told me the team was 'seriously considering' a topless mode. In a country where the 7-Eleven sells comic books of an octopus raping a young girl, maybe *Rumble Roses* is the definition of classy mainstream erotica. A topless mode? Why the hell not?

Kind regards

Tim Rogers



You don't even have to play – watching is fine…

FAMOUS FACES

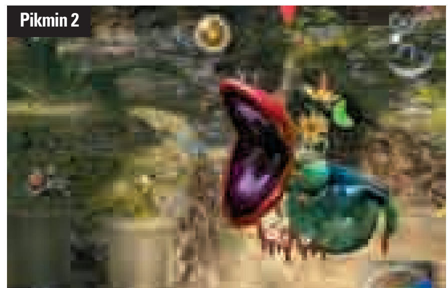
On day two of E3 while I was playing *Rumble Roses*, Acclaim president Greg Fischbach wandered by and watched with widened eyes. He stood there, marveling at the ingenuity of the Japanese as a female ninja grabbed a cowgirl's crotch and dunked her into mud. Unlike the mostly naked girls in *Backyard Wrestling* or what have you, the characters in *Rumble Roses* are, for the most part, adorably cute. I asked him what was up. His answer was: "This is interesting." Just like that. So I told him: "Yeah, this is the craziest game ever." He replied: "Yeah, it might be. It might be."

The next day, I kid you not, Yu Suzuki, producer of *Virtua Fighter* and *Shenmue*, joined me in some *Rumble Roses*. Hanging around that game was proving lucrative for my business card collection. I remembered something Suzuki said in an interview back when *Shenmue II* was wrapping up. He showed the interviewer how you can lock on to a person in a crowd, and follow them without touching the controller. The character Suzuki had chosen to lock onto was a girl. "Let's pick a pretty girl," he'd said, before making the decision.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Pachinko Slot Tokondensho	Success	PS2
2	Gundam SEED: Battle Assault	Square Enix	PS2
3	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	GC
4	Derby Stallion 04	Enterbrain	PS2
5	Kirby: Kagami no Daimeikyuu	Nintendo	GBA
6	Black Matrix 00	NEC	PSone
7	Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	GBA
8	Naruto 2	Tomy	GBA
9	Dragon Warrior V	Square Enix	PS2
10	Kinnikuman Generations	Bandai	PS2

(Updated 16/5/04)



Pikmin 2



Kinnikuman Generations

> **"I HAVE TO ADMIT IT'S BEEN VERY HARD TO CREATE THIS TYPE OF GAME – BUT AT THE SAME TIME WE'VE ALL ENJOYED CREATING IT VERY MUCH"**
> *YUJI SHIBATA, DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER, BANDAI*

BANDAI

YUJI SHIBATA

Online gaming – it's the future, or so we're told. But the experience of playing alongside absent friends is not something that everyone can afford to buy into. Thankfully, there are some developers who recognise this, and one in particular is attempting to bring online gaming to the offline world. "We started working on the *.hack* project nearly four years ago, when online games such as *Diablo*, *Ultima Online* and *EverQuest* were starting to become popular in Japan," says Yuji Shibata, deputy general manager at Bandai, the developer behind the epic RPG series, *.hack*. "At the time, we were playing a lot of these online games and could see the attraction of them. However, the target audience for *.hack* is primarily teenagers, so if you consider that you need a television, a console or PC, a telephone cable and a credit card to play an online game, you're immediately alienating your core audience… Our solution was to keep the attraction of online games, and of that style of communication, but to add the allure of an offline RPG. We wanted to show the attraction of the type of communication that online games offer without putting restrictions on who could actually play."

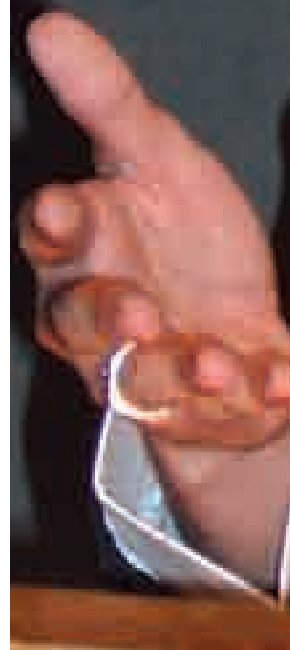
Generally, Bandai's vision of bringing the lure of online play to an offline audience works pretty well – although *.hack* does suffer from the problems that you'd expect from a game that has AI standing in for human interaction, it's still fairly convincing. However, the world of *.hack* really only comes into its own once you look at it from a cross-media standpoint. Released simultaneously as an animation and a graphic-novel serialisation as well as a game, *.hack*'s attempts to tell its story through a variety of media is a huge effort and goes beyond simply using one established idea to create something else, as most licences do.

"Lots of teenagers have become very interested in following the storyline of *.hack* because they're following the experiences of the various characters… across several media," says Shibata-san. "We often get asked which medium to go through first, in relation to understanding and enjoying *.hack*, but the answer is that you can start anywhere – the animation, the comic or the game. Even if you watch all the animation and read the comics, you won't see the last scene of the game. Likewise, if you finish the game, you won't see the plot of the animation. But if you go through all three, then you will at least start to understand what is going on."

Developing a world spread across three different media was only the beginning of Bandai's problems – it also had to create a game that was potentially infinite without the opportunity for expansion once it was released. The answer of splitting it into four unique titles might have been obvious, but it demanded much more work from the development team. "When we initially started planning the game we didn't have any idea to include animation or divide it into four parts," says Shibata-san. "But after we gathered all our ideas together we realised we would never fit it into one game, and we couldn't stop the three creators [*Evangelion* creator Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, *Ghost In The Shell* creator Kazunori Ito and renowned animation director Koichi Mashimo] either. We saw some new possibility in the project beyond that of just a game, so we investigated other media."

Of course, such a decision posed a massive risk – making a new RPG franchise a hit is hard enough, but when a long-term plan that demands success is set in motion you're asking for trouble. Thankfully, things appear to have worked out for the best; according to official figures, sales for the series increased as it went on, with many people who arrived late going back to earlier instalments to catch up. With the series already concluded in Japan and the US, you'd expect Bandai to have plans for a follow-up. But with so much effort having gone into the project already, it's no surprise that its creators are already looking at moving on to other ideas. "It's been very hard to create this type of game," says Shibata-san, "but at the same time we've all enjoyed creating the game very much and we are planning to make a new game at some point. Maybe it won't be possible, but I hope we can get it together again in the near future."

.hack//Mutation, the second part of the .hack series is out now for PlayStation2. *.hack//Infection* was reviewed in issue 16.



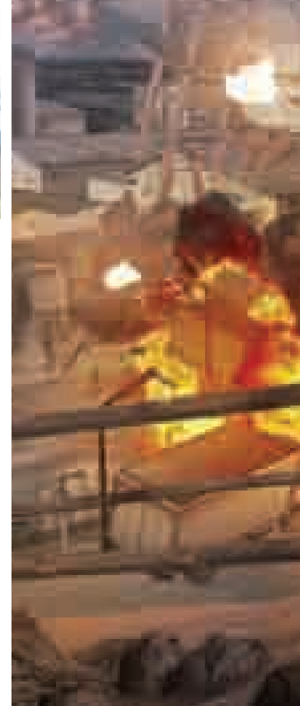


BORED OF DEVELOPING THE SAME OLD GAMES? FANCY A NEW CHALLENGE? THEN TRY CREATING AN ONLINE RPG WITHOUT THE ONLINE ELEMENTS, AND THAT'S SO BIG IT HAS TO BE SPREAD OVER FOUR TITLES. IT SOUNDS TOUGH, BUT BANDAI HAS ALREADY BEEN THERE AND DONE THAT…

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE PUT ON OUR FATIGUES TO GET REAL WITH PANDEMIC





PANDEMIC

TWO MAJOR PUBLISHERS, FOUR MASSIVE GAMES AND SIX YEARS OF MAKING QUALITY TITLES – THAT'S WHAT IT'S TAKEN TO PUSH PANDEMIC TO THE FOREFRONT OF THE GAMING WORLD…

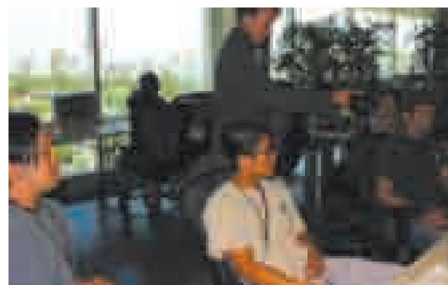
So, brown is the new black, quiet is the new loud, and videogames are the new rock and roll. Nothing is as slick and fast-moving as the games industry, which seems to be blossoming quickly into a golden age of interactive entertainment. If this analogy is correct – if gaming is outstripping Hollywood and the music business in terms of sheer vivacity – then it must have its own stars. The guys and girls whose games sell magazines, light up the internet with expectant chatter and, all-importantly, put joypads in hands. Pandemic is everywhere at the moment (appropriately, given its name), and is the Colin Farrell or Orlando Bloom of the industry – everywhere you turn it's part of yet another quality project. With *Full Spectrum Warrior*, *Mercenaries*, *Star Wars Battlefront* and *Destroy All Humans* in the works, Pandemic is truly A-list.

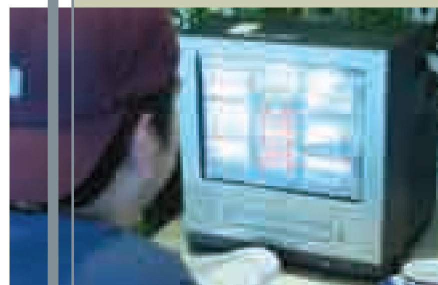
Pandemic has studios in Los Angeles and Brisbane, and employs over 150 staff who are currently working on four upcoming titles.











But while the studio's games are stellar, in the tradition of many an Oscar speech they wouldn't have got there without a long list of people to thank. "Pandemic is all about the people that work here," explains studio founder Andrew Goldman, "and we spend a tremendous amount of effort to recruit great talent. However, we're not just looking for great talents, we're looking for great personalities that will fit in and enhance the company culture. We have made it a top priority to create a happy, productive and fulfilling work environment – that all starts and ends with the people who work here. We want people to be energised and excited when they come to work." It sounds like that policy is working, as Pandemic staff are hard at work on four high-profile titles, but the growth of the company isn't just due to its favourable working environment. "Part of our expansion is a result of how 'large' games are becoming," enthuses William Henry Stahl, project leader on *Full Spectrum Warrior*. "We simply need more people to produce triple-A content within current time constraints. We expanded as a company pretty quickly… but there were growing pains. On the good side, we have several code bases going at the same time, allowing us to share technology and tools to get demos together quickly or R&D some systems; on the downside we have many more people to manage. This requires more middle management which runs the risk of distancing the person responsible for the vision from the people responsible for the vision's realisation."

Fears of paperwork and bureaucracy aside, Pandemic is free to concentrate on attaining that 'triple-A' quality, which seems the right phrase when discussing *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Adapted from the simulator used to train the US army, the game is set to be huge in the US and UK, but then it's bound to be good when you consider how demanding its original audience was. "First, they [the US army] wanted a product that would offer a cost-effective training aid for the soldiers who did not benefit from the more traditional and expensive training installations," explains Goldman. "Second, the army wanted to make sure that these new materials were entertaining and would appeal to their soldiers who happen to be in the heart of the game-playing audience." A brutally realistic army simulator might be a great idea for a game, but the best ideas are not always the most commercially successful. Is Pandemic worried that the subject matter might remove focus from the solid game engine lurking beneath? "I'm certain we've created a game that is fun and visually impressive," says Stahl. "THQ [*FSW*'s publisher] was completely committed to achieving a triple-A polish level. The subject matter has also proven to be very popular. I think the real challenge is going to be for marketing to get the word out there. If they succeed – as I believe they will – I'm sure the game will find an audience."

Indeed, much rests on the shoulders of THQ. Pandemic's future is set to be incredibly bright, and both THQ and Activision have been impressed by the work it's produced, thrusting the developer into the limelight. "Becoming a household name is a key element in making the best games," explains Goldman. "Increasing the stature of Pandemic as a developer allows



"I'M CERTAIN WE'VE CREATED A GAME THAT IS FUN AND VISUALLY IMPRESSIVE. THE SUBJECT MATTER HAS PROVEN TO BE VERY POPULAR"

WILLIAM HENRY STAHL, PANDEMIC

FUTURE PERFECT

We all know it's responsible for *Full Spectrum Warrior*, but what else is in the Pandemic pipeline?

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

A third-person shooter from the *Battlefield 1942* mould, this *Star Wars* title looks like it will continue the revamp of the Lucas licence that *Knights Of The Old Republic* began. Sixteen-player online play is guaranteed, as well as a single-player romp through the galaxies of the Clone Wars and the Rebel uprising.



MERCENARIES

This free-roaming shooter set in an imaginary Korean war is hot property. Players control a lone gunman who captures war criminals for cash and weapons. The most striking aspect of the game is the level of choice, from where to go and what to do, to which guns would be best suited to your task.



DESTROY ALL HUMANS

This is THQ's trump card for its 2005 line-up. Controlling an alien, you're compelled to do what title suggests: destroy all humans. Whether this is done by mind-control or a blast from your ray-gun is up to you. Pandemic is trying to cram in as much B-movie humour as possible, making this a title to watch.

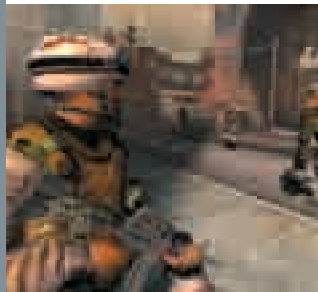


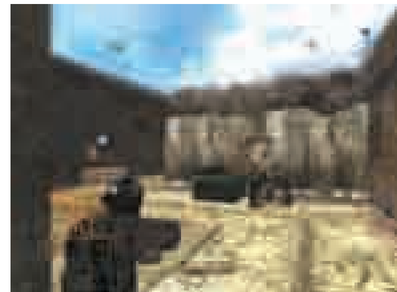


Star Wars Battlefront will follow *KOTOR*'s lead by going online, but will offer a more action-oriented blast through the many famous locations.











Full Spectrum Warrior brings a novel approach to war games, as you never get to actually fire a weapon, instead merely telling your men where to shoot while they do the trigger pulling.

us to attract more and more talent and to put larger efforts behind our products." The Pandemic founder acknowledges that it can be hard for small developers to get their first break, and is clear about the reasons for this. "The bets on products today are huge, and only the hit projects are reaching profitability," he says. "Publishers want to focus on their brands, and they want to work with internal and established external houses to minimise the development risk on their crown jewels."

The ultimate jewel in gaming has to be the *Star Wars* licence, which Pandemic has bagged in order to produce *Star Wars Battlefront*, an online title. The studio was responsible for last year's poorly received *Clone Wars*, but the pedigree of its work in the meantime has clearly made up for this. And besides, Pandemic was just ahead of its time… "The original *Clone Wars* pitch had a lot of the *Battlefront* concepts in it," says Goldman, "but the console market just was not ready for it. After *Clone Wars* shipped it was a good time to go back and look at what we were thinking." It seems Pandemic has learnt from the mistakes of *Clone Wars* and is now at one with



1 ANDREW GOLDMAN, FOUNDER

IN A NUTSHELL: Andrew Goldman already had an impressive CV in the games industry before setting up Pandemic six years ago. He previously worked for Activision on its *Spycraft* and *Battlezone* titles, and has since been involved in every Pandemic project.

2 WILLIAM HENRY STAHL, PROJECT LEADER FOR FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

IN A NUTSHELL: William Henry Stahl also came from Activision, having worked on its *Battlezone* title. After completing work on *Battlezone II*, Stahl moved to Pandemic in 1998, where his first title was *Full Spectrum Warrior*.



"WITHIN THE WALLS OF PANDEMIC STUDIOS YOU CAN SENSE OUR PASSION FOR GAMES"
WILLIAM HENRY STAHL, PANDEMIC

SHOCK AND WAR

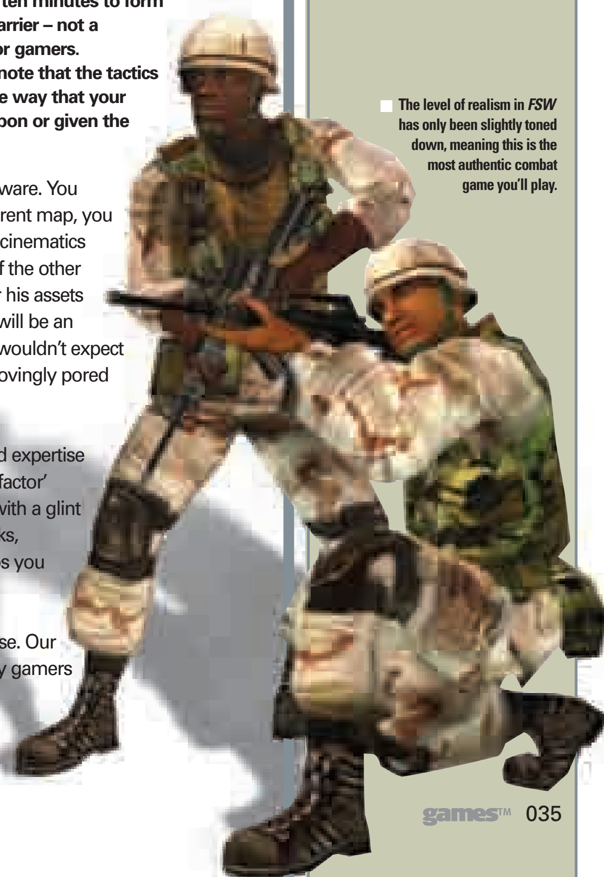
***Full Spectrum Warrior*, as everyone seems to know, is based on the simulator, also designed by Pandemic, used to train the US marines that are now involved in the Iraq conflict. However, Pandemic decided that although realism in games is more and more sought-after, it would still have to tone down the game for its Xbox release. Having played the game, it's difficult to tell where the cuts have been made, so what exactly are the differences between the commercial and commissioned products? It turns out that only subtle changes have occurred. In the army sim the player is not allowed to lose any men, whereas the Xbox version allows the loss of one. Additionally, the smoke grenades have been sped up, as normal smoke can take around five to ten minutes to form an effective vision-obscuring barrier – not a particularly thrilling prospect for gamers. Enthusiasts will be pleased to note that the tactics used are real, even down to the way that your men will not fire unless fired upon or given the order to shoot.**

the demands of the modern console gamer. So what style of project is the company currently developing? "We're focusing on two types of games at the moment," says Stahl. "First, games that closely simulate a group of characters in a really detailed environment like *FSW* does. Second, wide-open games where you can do anything, go anywhere and destroy anything."

It sounds like Pandemic is keen to push back some gaming boundaries, so it's unsurprising that it's wholeheartedly embraced the concept of Xbox Live. *Battlefront* will use it extensively, as will *Full Spectrum Warrior*, and in the latter title the line between single-player and multiplayer experiences should be seamless. "*FSW*'s goals with respect to Live play were to blur the lines between online play and single play," says Stahl. "I think that online gaming is going to become more popular only when getting online becomes more transparent to the player. In *FSW*, for example, we make no distinction between playing with someone online or playing alone. There is only one mission tree. You start the game, and at any time another player can join and start playing with you – the game is Live-aware. You don't have to start over or load a different map, you just keep playing. All the save points, cinematics and gameplay are exactly the same. If the other player has to leave, you just take over his assets and keep on playing." If this works it will be an impressive achievement, though we wouldn't expect anything less from a title that's been lovingly pored over by Pandemic for four years.

Yet for all the technical finesse and expertise of Pandemic's titles, there's an 'X factor' which makes them stand out. Stahl, with a glint in his eye, sums it up when he remarks, "Within the walls of Pandemic Studios you can sense our passion for games. It's something that permeates senior management and infects everyone else. Our goal has always been to give as many gamers as possible their 'money's worth' of entertainment." Amen to that.

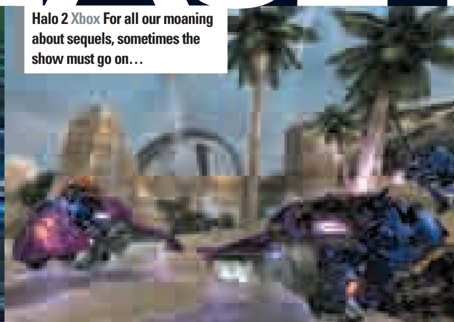




The level of realism in *FSW* has only been slightly toned down, meaning this is the most authentic combat game you'll play.

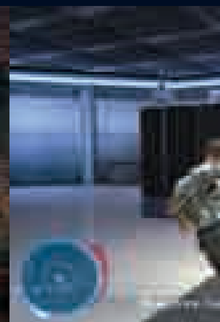
RELEASE LISTS


Custom Robo Cube Mini-mecha GameCube fun.


Halo 2 Xbox For all our moaning about sequels, sometimes the show must go on…


Prince Of Persia 2 Multi Our favourite gaming royal somersaults back on page 46.

somersaults back on page 46.

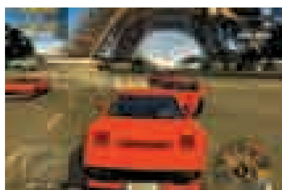


games™ MOST PLAYED

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

As much as we may protest about premium downloadable content, when it's done as well as the Paris booster pack that was recently made available by Bizarre Creations, it's hard to find fault. And there we were thinking the best couldn't get any better…



YU-GI-OH!: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT 2004

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Konami

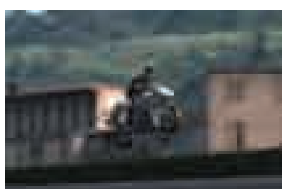
Despite some pitiful AI in the single-player mode, this game has driven us card crazy in our bid to become this year's *Yu-Gi-Oh!* world champion. Hopes are high, but getting knocked out in the first round by a seven year old is looking all but inevitable.



DRIV3R

Format: Multi
Publisher: Atari

We admit it – we've been smashing up trucks and bothering pedestrians ever since the preview code arrived in the office. There's still some work to be done on the main Undercover mode but the sheer amount to do and see in Take A Ride mode will make *Driv3r* almost worth the asking price alone. Roll on the finished game…





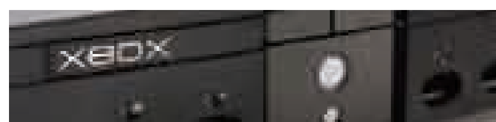
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '04			
18 June	.hack//MUTATION	Atari	
18 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
18 June	Showdown: Legends Of Wrestling	Acclaim	
21 June	Driv3r	Atari	
25 June	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco	
25 June	World War Zero: Iron Storm	Wanadoo	
TBC	Shellshock: Nam '67	Eidos	
TBC	Samurai Warriors	EA	
TBC	Mashed	Empire	
TBC	Perfect Ace 2	Oxygen	
JULY '04			
9 July	Onimusha 3	Capcom	
9 July	Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	Wanted
30 July	Catwoman	EA	
TBC	Athens 2004	Sony	
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
Q3 '04			
TBC	Conflict: Vietnam	SCi	
TBC	Burnout 3	EA	Wanted
TBC	Terminator 3: Redemption	Atari	
TBC	.hack//OUTBREAK	Atari	
TBC	The Punisher	THQ	
TBC	Spy Vs Spy	TDK	
TBC	Madden NFL 2005	EA	
TBC	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	
TBC	Crisis Zone	Sony	
TBC	Def Jam: Fight For New York	EA	
TBC	Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi	
TBC	FlatOut	Empire	
TBC	The Movies	Activision	
TBC	Resident Evil: Outbreak	Capcom	
TBC	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Juiced	Acclaim	
TBC	Crash 'N' Burn	Eidos	
TBC	StarCraft: Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Gradius V	Konami	Wanted
TBC	IndyCar Series 2005	Codemasters	
TBC	Jak 3	Sony	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	
TBC	Nicktoons Eyetoy	THQ	
TBC	Killzone	Sony	
TBC	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCi	
TBC	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
TBC	Rocky Legends	Ubisoft	
TBC	Ratchet & Clank 3	Sony	



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '04			
18 June	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	
18 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
25 June	Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	
25 June	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco	
TBC	Phantasy Star Online 3: C.A.R.D. Revolution	SEGA	
JULY '04			
01 July	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	
30 July	Catwoman	EA	
Q3 '04			
TBC	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	The Movies	Activision	
TBC	Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	
TBC	Madden NFL 2005	EA	
TBC	Animal Crossing	Nintendo	
TBC	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	
TBC	Def Jam: Fight For New York	EA	
TBC	Spy Vs Spy	TDK	
TBC	Medabots: Infinity	Nintendo	
TBC	WWE Day Of Reckoning	THQ	
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Terminator 3: Redemption	Atari	
TBC	Donkey Konga	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Star Fox 2	Nintendo	
TBC	Mario Story 2	Nintendo	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '04			
18 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
18 June	Breakdown	EA	
18 June	Showdown: Legends Of Wrestling	Acclaim	
21 June	Driv3r	Atari	
25 June	Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	Atari	
25 June	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco	
TBC	Shellshock: 'Nam 67	Eidos	
TBC	Mashed	Empire	
JULY '04			
02 July	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
09 July	Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	Wanted
30 July	Catwoman	EA	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

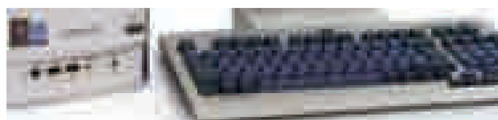
Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain PS2 A triumphant return? Erm, no…

Thief: Deadly Shadows Multi Light-fingered skulking in Ion Storm's medieval tour-de-force.

Viewtiful Joe 2 Multi Flick to page 74 to find out what happens next…

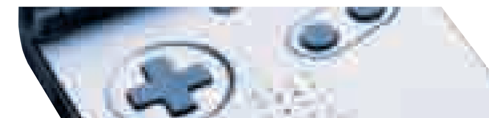
The Legend Of Zelda Cube Nintendo fans, ask and ye shall receive.

TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
Q3 '04			
TBC	Spy Vs Spy	TDK	
TBC	Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Madden NFL 2005	EA	
TBC	Chronicles Of Riddick	Vivendi	
TBC	Conflict: Vietnam	SCi	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCi	
TBC	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	
TBC	Def Jam: Fight For New York	EA	
TBC	FlatOut	Empire	
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
TBC	Rocky Legends	Ubisoft	
TBC	Painkiller	Dreamcatcher	
TBC	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	
TBC	Crash 'N' Burn	Eidos	
TBC	Juiced	Acclaim	
TBC	Burnout 3	EA	Wanted
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Fable	Microsoft	
TBC	IndyCar Series 2005	Codemasters	
TBC	Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi	
TBC	Samurai Warriors	EA	
TBC	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
TBC	StarCraft: Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Sudeki	Microsoft	
TBC	Dead Or Alive Ultimate	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
TBC	Advent Rising	Majesco	
TBC	Doom 3	Activision	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '04			
18 June	Showdown: Legends Of Wrestling	Acclaim	
18 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
25 June	Blitzkrieg: Burning Horizon	CDV	
25 June	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco	
TBC	Chaos League	Digital Jesters	
TBC	Shellshock: Nam '67	Eidos	
TBC	Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II	Codemasters	
JULY '04			
02 July	Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus	Vivendi	
30 July	Catwoman	EA	
Q3 '04			
TBC	The Suffering	Midway	
TBC	Evil Genius	Vivendi	
TBC	Conflict: Vietnam	SCi	
TBC	Black 9	Majesco	
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Spider-Man 2	Activision	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCi	
TBC	Kohan II: Kings Of War	Take 2	
TBC	Myst IV: Revelation	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Doom 3	Activision	
TBC	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
TBC	FlatOut	Empire	
TBC	Juiced	Acclaim	
TBC	Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Wanted
TBC	LOTR: Battle For Middle Earth	EA	
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA	
TBC	Warhammer Online	SEGA	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
TBC	The Movies	Activision	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCi	
TBC	The Sims 2	EA	Wanted
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Advent Rising	Majesco	
TBC	Eastside Hockey Manager	SEGA	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Rome: Total War	Activision	Wanted



GAME BOY ADVANCE

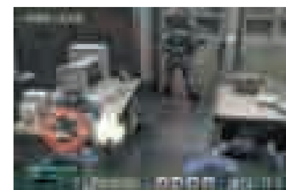
Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '04			
18 June	Shrek 2	Activision	
25 June	Spyro: Fusion	Vivendi	
25 June	Crash Bandicoot: Fusion	Vivendi	
25 June	Sonic Advance 3	THQ	
JULY '04			
02 July	Kirby And The Amazing Mirror	Nintendo	
16 July	Hamtaro: Ham Ham Games	Nintendo	Wanted
16 July	Fire Emblem	Nintendo	Wanted
30 July	Catwoman	EA	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh!: Reshef Of Destruction	Konami	
Q3 '04			
TBC	Donkey Kong Country 2	Nintendo	
TBC	CT Special Forces 3	LSP	Wanted
TBC	Madden NFL 2005	EA	
TBC	Megaman Battle Network 4	Capcom	
TBC	Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	
TBC	Yu Yu Spirit Detective	Atari	
TBC	Pokémon Leaf Green/Fire Red	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Hamtaro: Rainbow Rescue	Nintendo	
TBC	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. We did try, mind. Fairly hard.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

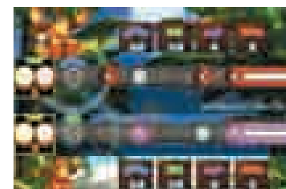
TIME CRISIS: CRISIS ZONE

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony
It's been so long since Namco's machine-gun-based shooter arrived on the arcade scene that we'd almost given up hope of a PS2 version. But fear not – the port is well under way and will feature the same huge amount of extras that we now expect from Namco's home conversions.



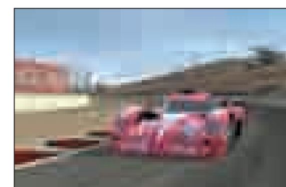
DONKEY KONGA [VARIOUS]

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
With *Hit Parade Volume 2* about to land in Japan and a whole new set of tunes filling the US version of the original (not to mention the possibility of a whole new PAL track listing and the forthcoming *Jungle Beat*), now is a good time to own a bongo peripheral, however silly it may be.



FORZA MOTORSPORT

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
The idea of yet another racing sim might leave you cold, but having been mightily impressed with *Forza* at E3 we'll be keeping a close eye on it until we finally get behind the wheel. It's high time something dragged us away from *PGR2*, albeit kicking and screaming, and this title – with its spectacular graphics and licensed cars – might just do that.



'THINK TANK'

THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

DOES FAMILIARITY BREED CONTEMPT?



'Risk aversity' – sounds awfully like corporate speak doesn't it? Sadly, this is what is ripping the soul out of original games development, and it means you're going to be stuck with more sequels, franchises and licences for a while.

Many hardcore gamers blame developers for a lack of vision, for producing sequels, working on licences and franchises; but for the vast majority this is simply self-preservation in an industry that has become just that – an industry rather than the creative, artful pursuit that gamers tend to perceive.

It wasn't too long ago when teams actually created games rather than just developed and produced them, but the dynamics of the games industry are such that publishers simply don't take multi-million dollar risks when publishing big console titles. This makes original titles unpredictable in terms of sales and that represents a high risk.

Add to this the fact that the games-buying public is now steered by casual players who see games as just another entertainment medium, who are influenced heavily by advertising and promotions – it's no surprise that some publishers spend as much, if not more, on acquiring a licence and marketing it than they do on game development.

While this mass market is happily consuming sequel after sequel, further nails are being hammered into the coffin of original game development. Yet with sequels such as *Half-Life 2*, *Doom 3*, *GTA: San Andreas* and *GT4* on the way, you could be lambasted for even considering wanting something original when titles such as these whet the appetite of millions.

For the moment, publishers and, indirectly, developers will continue to give the mass market what it wants – and that's more of the same.

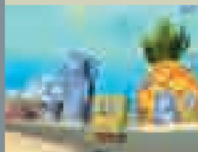
'Mr X' is studio manager at a British software company

FROM THE FRONT

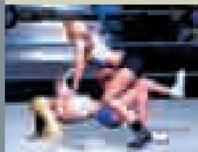
ACTIVISION CELEBRATES A PROFITABLE YEAR WHILE EIDOS FENDS OFF VARIOUS BUYOUT RUMOURS



Quirky titles like *Gregory Horror Show* haven't sold.



SpongeBob's square pants have helped THQ.



Licensed games have again been money-spinners.



THE SECRETS OF THEIR SUCCESS

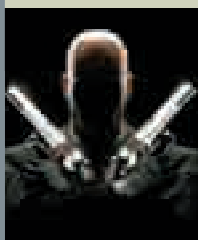
THE END OF THE FISCAL YEAR SEES THE RICH GET RICH AND ATARI GET POORER

Another month, another round of publishers declaring their success from the rooftops. With many companies reaching the end of their fiscal years, those with money to burn are happily standing up to be counted. First on the podium is the enthusiastic Activision, whose record-level revenues of $947.7 million not only beat its own projected success, but also set it up for a potential income of over $1 billion in the coming year, putting it in the same league as firms like Take 2 and EA.

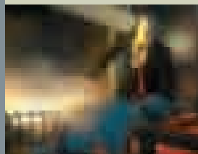
Though not reaching anywhere near the same level of success, THQ has also seen a highly productive year thanks to licences such as Nickelodeon and WWE. The company's revenues rose 37 per cent to a record $641 million, with net income up some $33.3 million on the previous year.

Sadly, things aren't so bright for Atari, despite the unimpressive *Enter The Matrix* selling over five million units worldwide. Due to last year's decision to recapitalise the company, net income for the year stands at a loss of £38.6 million.

But it looks as though Capcom has found itself bottom of this month's barrel with some disheartening figures that give the company its second net loss in as many years. Blaming the disappointing performances of its key products in the US and Europe for a huge drop in operating



Even with Agent 47 on board, Eidos is struggling.



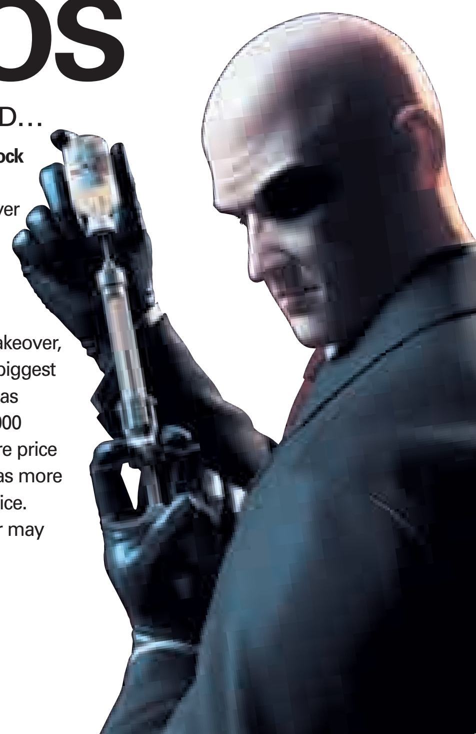
So is there an Eidos buyout or not? Anyone?

AN EYE FOR AN EIDOS

THERE MAY BE TROUBLE AHEAD…

Eidos has had a turbulent few months, with stock acquisitions by outside interests causing fluctuations in its share price. Rumours of a takeover by rival publishers added fuel to the fire and caused shares to rise to a 12-month high of 184 pence. In setting the record straight, though, Eidos may have damaged its chances of fending off a buyout. The firm rubbished any possibility of a takeover, but then confirmed poor sales of the company's biggest title of the year so far, *Hitman: Contracts*, which has fallen short of re-order estimates by around 700,000 units. This, in turn, led to a collapse of Eidos' share price by 32 per cent in one day – the result of which was more rumours of a buyout due to the drastically low price.

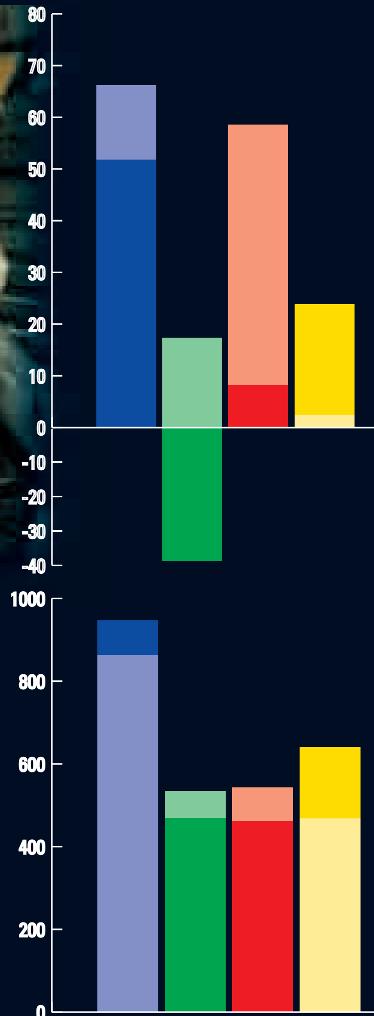
So by the time you read this an Eidos takeover may be a reality. Will the house of Lara survive?





profit of 79 per cent to ¥1.4 billion (around $12.3 million), the only good news comes in the form of the firm's Japanese figures, which are bolstered by the publisher's deal with Rockstar Games to handle the Japanese release of *GTA III*. The continuing growth of its arcade division has also created revenue.

Despite all this, the company hopes to return to profitability in the coming 2004-2005 period through movement onto new formats – namely the PlayStation Portable and Nintendo DS, as well as mobile phone and online gaming.



Net Income ($million)
– Fiscal year 2002-2003

Activision	$66.2 million
Atari	$17.4 million
Capcom	$58.6 million
THQ	$2.5 million

Net Income ($million)
– Fiscal year 2003- 2004

Activision	$77.7 million
Atari	-$38.6 million
Capcom	$12.3 million
THQ	$35.8 million

Net Revenue ($million)
– Fiscal year 2002-2003

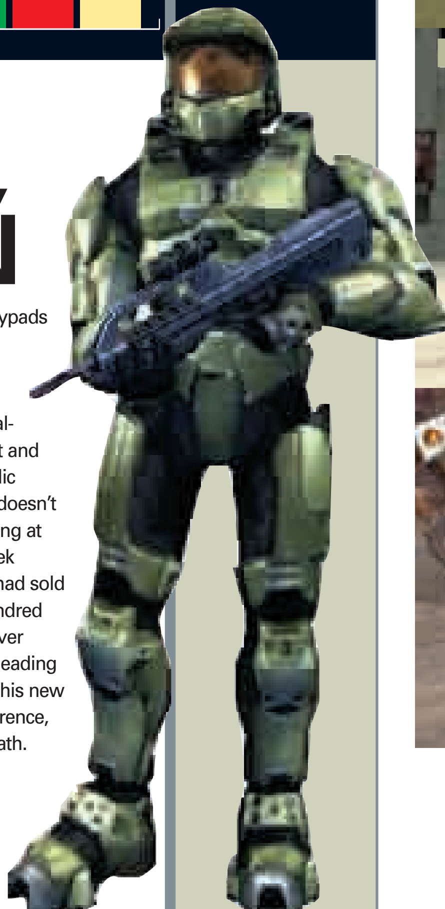
Activision	$864.1 million
Atari	$534.2 million
Capcom	$543.5 million
THQ	$467.8 million

Net Revenue ($million)
– Fiscal year 2003-2004

Activision	$947.7 million
Atari	$468.9 million
Capcom	$462 million
THQ	$641 million

NO SURRENDER FOR MICROSOFT

XBOX TRIES, TRIES AGAIN



It might not be the most popular company ever, but never let it be said that Microsoft isn't persistent. Sadly, with regard to the Japanese market, at least, the comparison can only be to a dog that never stops trying to catch its own tail…

The latest attempt by Microsoft to ensure that the Xbox makes it big in Japan comes in the form of the Xbox Platinum Pack 2, a special bundle that went on sale late last month. For a mere ¥19,000 (approximately £95), you can get yourself an Xbox console, a DVD playback kit, copies of *Halo* and *Crimson Skies*, two joypads and two months' free subscription to Xbox Live.

However, while you'd think that this constant deal-making between Microsoft and the Japanese gaming public would lead to big sales, it doesn't seem to be working. Looking at hardware sales for the week ending 16 May, the Xbox had sold only 240 units – over a hundred less than the PSone and over 30,000 behind the market-leading PS2. We'd like to say that this new bundle might make a difference, but we won't hold our breath.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

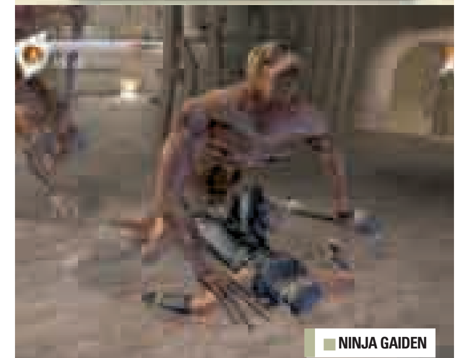
	Title	Publisher	Format
1	UEFA Euro 2004	EA Sports	Multi
2	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	GC
3	Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Multi
4	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Xbox
5	Norton Internet Security 2004	Norton	PC
6	Fight Night 2004	EA Sports	Multi
7	Transformers	Atari	PS2
8	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	Multi
9	The Suffering	Midway	Multi
10	Norton Anti-Virus 2004	Norton	PC

A strong few weeks of releases sees some decent games (in the form of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Hitman: Contracts*) and a few not-so-decent ones (*UEFA 2004*, anyone?) hitting the heights, while the trend for PC security continues.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of ELSPA (UK) Ltd. UK Full Price Sales Charts (All Formats) (w/e 15 May 2004)

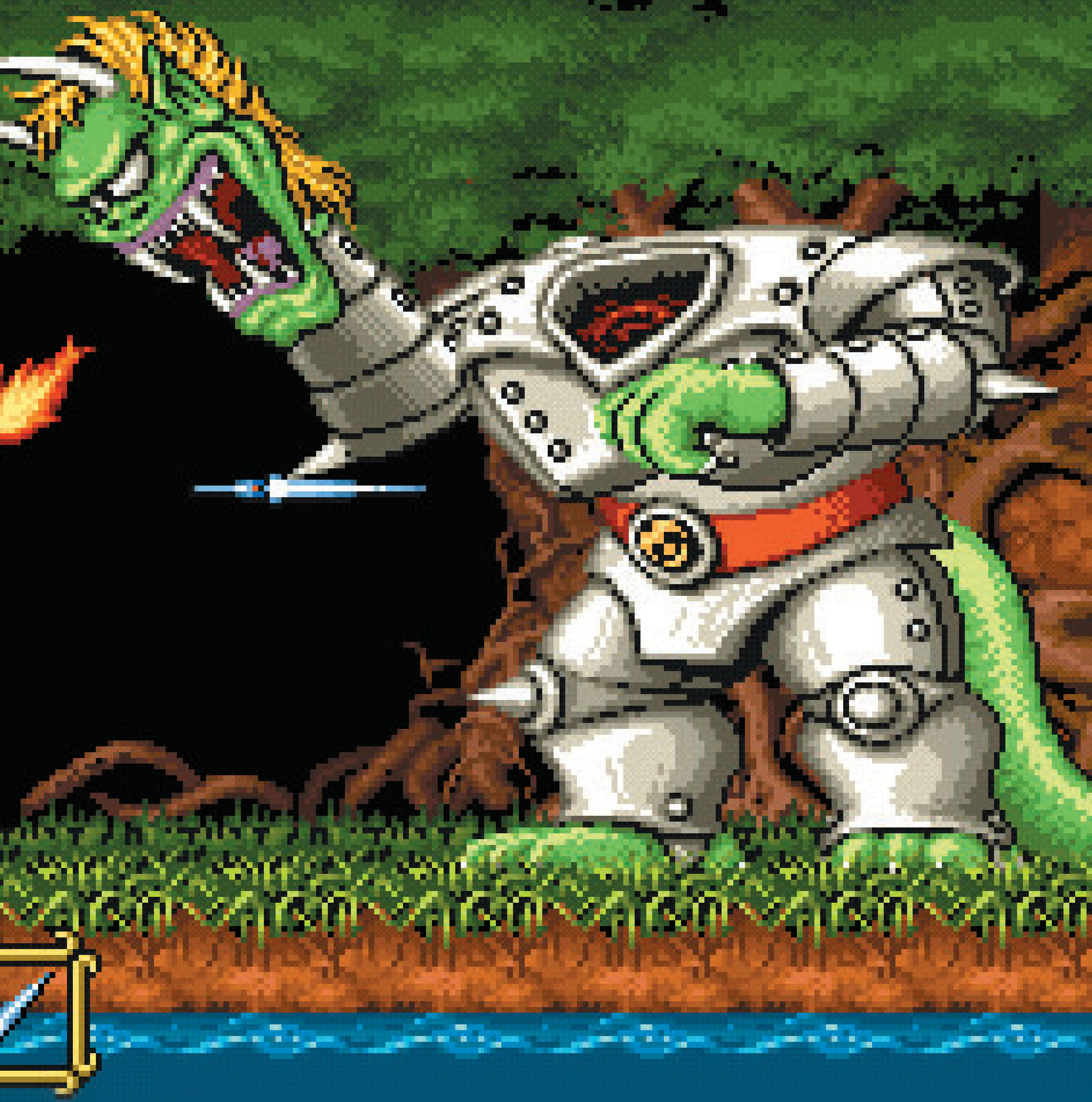

UEFA EURO 2004

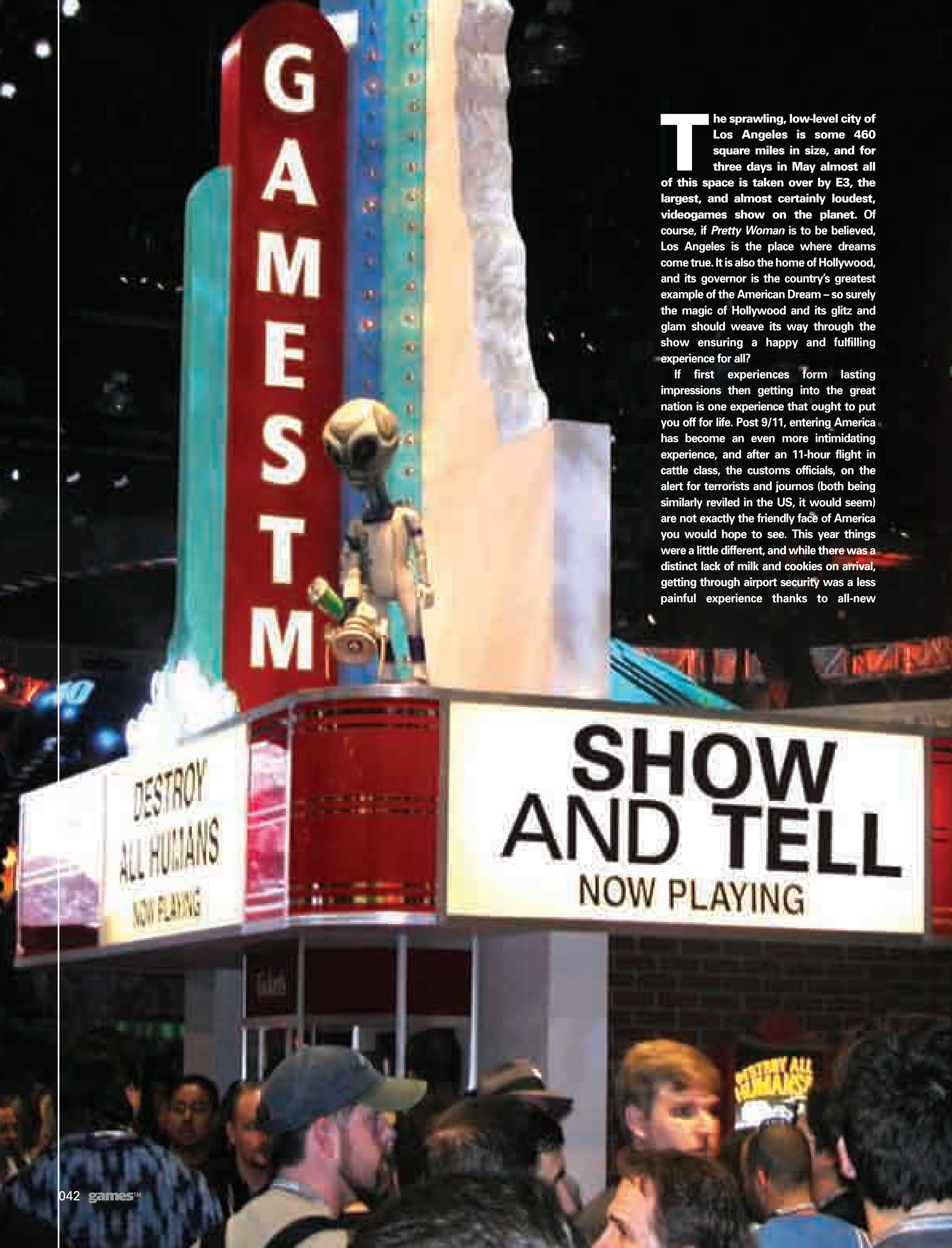

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM


NINJA GAIDEN



Carry On Don't Lose Your Head **Ghouls 'N Ghosts Arcade [Capcom] 1988**


SCORE
35000
PLAYER-2
0



The sprawling, low-level city of Los Angeles is some 460 square miles in size, and for three days in May almost all of this space is taken over by E3, the largest, and almost certainly loudest, videogames show on the planet. Of course, if *Pretty Woman* is to be believed, Los Angeles is the place where dreams come true. It is also the home of Hollywood, and its governor is the country's greatest example of the American Dream – so surely the magic of Hollywood and its glitz and glam should weave its way through the show ensuring a happy and fulfilling experience for all?

If first experiences form lasting impressions then getting into the great nation is one experience that ought to put you off for life. Post 9/11, entering America has become an even more intimidating experience, and after an 11-hour flight in cattle class, the customs officials, on the alert for terrorists and journos (both being similarly reviled in the US, it would seem) are not exactly the friendly face of America you would hope to see. This year things were a little different, and while there was a distinct lack of milk and cookies on arrival, getting through airport security was a less painful experience thanks to all-new

CELEBRATING ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY, THIS YEAR'S ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPOSITION WAS BIGGER THAN EVER AND, FOR SOME PEOPLE, TWO DAYS LONGER…





You heard it here first – E3 will return…



Nintendo's stand – packed with faithful.

security measures that involved fingerprinting and having a mugshot taken (though we're convinced this involved some sort of retinal scanning). Though no less daunting, the customs officials seemed more inclined to let people in unhindered, on the understanding that should you even consider violating any laws Tom Cruise and his pre-crime division would rappel into your hotel room and drag you away.

Safely through, the mixture of heat, tiredness and a sense that your circadian rhythm has been shot to buggery always combine to fill you with that strange feeling of dread and excitement that typifies the average E3. The fact that you have no idea where you are, what time zone your body is trying to slot itself into and the fact that, once again, another E3 is upon you, being held in the exact same place as previous years, creates a certain *Groundhog Day* feeling that's hard to ignore.

This year, and for the sake of change, the Hispanic area of downtown LA was eschewed in favour of the Korean district as our temporary home; no more salubrious but certainly less menacing at night. Anyone entertaining the idea that journos live the high life should remember that it's possible to earn a better living working in McDonald's (though possibly not the one opposite our hotel, where the staff could barely count but were at least protected by a security guard armed with a Magnum…).

KEEPING UP WITH THE SONYS

As is now tradition, E3 unofficially started two days early, with all the major developers hosting a pre-show conference. Getting people's attention at a show attended by 67,000 punters can prove tricky, so some developers choose to hold events to showcase their line-up and pique the interest of journos, buyers and industry figures away from the hubbub of the Los Angeles Convention Center. Though Konami, Square and Capcom all vied for attention with key games such as *Final Fantasy XII*, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* and *Resident Evil 4*, it was the hardware developers' events that were most keenly anticipated. Handheld revelations aside, the importance of Nintendo, Microsoft and Sony is such that, being the hardware manufacturers, they shape the future and the tone of the videogames market like no other companies.

Microsoft was first up and was clearly determined to make an impression, or at least evangelise about XNA, the Xbox and what it considered to be its key releases. *Halo 2* easily dominated proceedings, partly because it was the single most impressive piece of software shown but also because it's the most anticipated. After that, everything else seemed less assured, but what was obvious was that Microsoft clearly felt it had found its place as a hardware developer. Disregarding Nintendo entirely, Microsoft was confident enough not only to laugh at itself but also to lampoon Sony in a spoof of American TV show, *The Apprentice*.

The focus this year seemed to be on matching and bettering what Sony offered – the Battle for Middle-Ground, if you will. *Forza Motorsport* was Microsoft's take on *Gran Turismo*, and the 'surprise' announcement that EA was going to support Xbox Live would ensure that gamers need not turn to the PS2 for their MOR thrills. Likewise, the unveiling of an Xbox webcam. So far only the video conferencing capabilities have been confirmed but it will no doubt be used sometime in the future for the kind of interactive parlour games that have made the EyeToy such a global success.

It was clear from the presentation that Microsoft, having already attained a hardcore following, is looking to broaden its installed user base by offering a varied line-up suited to all gaming predilections. These games, coupled with the expected drop in price of the Xbox, should mean that the console will be an even more tantalising prospect towards the end of the year, and with the successor to the Xbox just around ▷

SHOW AND TELL



71.3 million units. But while it pointed out that its lead was comprehensive, it stopped short of mocking its rivals, which would have been unnecessary. A strong, if slightly predictable, line-up of games was shown, again all safe bets and established franchises. *Gran Turismo 4, GTA: San Andreas* and *The Getaway: Black Monday* were all rolled out, with only *Killzone* standing out as a truly original 'triple-A' IP. Given its domination of the console market it's not too surprising that Sony is happy to rely on its bankable hits to see it through the year, but we can only hope that it's working on something a little more original for the launch of the PS3.

"IT WAS CLEAR THAT MICROSOFT IS LOOKING TO BROADEN ITS USER BASE BY OFFERING A VARIED LINE-UP SUITED TO ALL GAMING PREDILECTIONS"

the corner, getting as many Xboxes into as many homes as possible will be vital if the company wishes to pose a serious threat to Sony next time around.

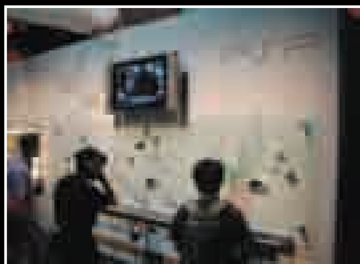
CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

By comparison, Sony's event was a suitably glitzy but more relaxed affair that lacked the bravado of Microsoft's show. However, it was no less confident of itself, and with good reason. Here was a company boasting an installed user base of some

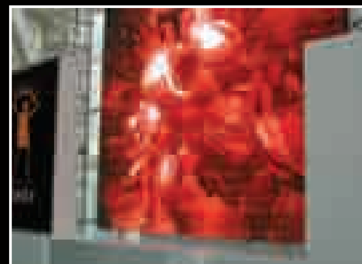
The main event, however, was not really the PS2's pending software catalogue, but the unveiling of Sony's attempt to thwart Nintendo's dominance in the handheld market. Amidst much whooping and a-hollerin' the PSP was shown, and those present knew that it was good. Unlike the DS, the PSP was not playable, but that didn't prevent it from being one of the major talking points of the show.

Nintendo delayed its conference to ensure that all those who had visited Sony's could travel from one end of town to the other. Those in attendance found the company in a bullish mood. Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo's new executive vice president of sales and marketing, opened the show. "I'm about kicking ass, I'm about taking names, and we're about making games," he bellowed. The last part was pretty straightforward, but the rest of it was somewhat confusing. Irrespective of what we thought, the internet is now awash with Reggie fan sites (check out www.reggie.netrunner2k2.net). His was the job of finally unveiling the DS to an

The PSP was on show, but kept behind glass because it wasn't playable. Come on, Sony – sort it out.









The appearance of the DS was enough to cause certain Nintendo fans to explode. Not literally.





audience of Nintendophiles – the response would have made Billy Graham envious. Apparently, people cried at the sight of a new Nintendo platform, but we didn't notice any of this due to the deafening and disorientating cheering.

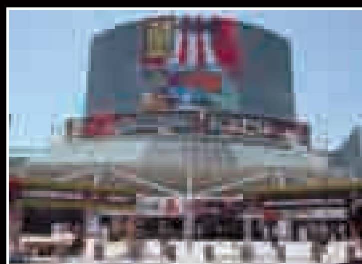
Of course, a Nintendo pre-show event wouldn't be the same without an appearance by God himself, and he didn't let his faithful down. Armed with Link's sword and shield (perhaps with the intention of kicking ass), Shigeru Miyamoto appeared onstage to announce another chapter in Link's history – the first three rows of the congregation promptly spontaneously combusted.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE

And with that, the pre-show events were over. In just two days Sony and Nintendo had unveiled their new handhelds and Microsoft had confirmed that one of the most anticipated games of recent times would be released by the end of the year – all of which were key announcements that warranted the kind of excitement that only the Americans can really generate.

Under normal circumstances this would have made for exciting news, but looking past this it was clear that aside from the bullish presentations the actual software shown was rather disappointing. If gamers were hoping for innovation and originality then they were disappointed. Instead it would appear that for hardware and software developers alike, the year ahead will be one of consolidation; not so much a lull before the next round of hardware announcements but a period where developers look to generate as much revenue from existing formats before their attention is drawn inevitably towards the next generation of consoles.

The show itself bore this out, and in between scurrying from one meeting to another it was apparent that key franchise after key franchise had been dusted off and given yet another lick of paint, sometimes for little or no discernable reason (*Tekken 5*, anyone?). Perhaps we're just jaded hacks and there's nothing wrong with sequels, but you can judge for yourself as the next 40 pages provide a snapshot of some of the many games that were at the show. 





ALSO AT THE SHOW

This year's show boasted record-breaking attendance, and it seemed like the majority of the visitors weren't famous developers but the waddling masses. They came armed with Xboxes and wireless network adapters and gained entrance to the show because every single one of them runs a tinpot website that happens to be about games. They attend E3 every year to collect as many ill-fitting T-shirts as possible, play the "AWESOME!" new games and get in the way. They also provide the much-needed whooping and hollering that no press briefing can do without. Though they do possess a commendable passion for videogames, a little more exercise wouldn't hurt.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2 [WORKING TITLE]

■ Using two weapons at once isn't just showboating – it has its messily life-ending uses too…

"WE'VE WORKED A LOT ON ENEMY AI… IN SANDS OF TIME IT LOOKED A LITTLE REDUNDANT AND REPETITIVE"

YANNIS MALLAT, PRODUCER, UBISOFT



■ First game not challenging enough for you? Try this enormous boss for size. Or run away.



■ Even if it pains you greatly, the Prince has to kill in order to maintain his time-altering powers.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



FRANCHISE PROFILE

■ Jordan Mechner spent nearly four years working on the original *Prince Of Persia*. The revolutionary rotoscoped title was a huge success upon release in 1989, and a sequel followed four years later. Despite a misfire with *POP3D* in 1999, the property has endured on the strength of its mythical iconography and last year's critically acclaimed relaunch.

HISTORY

■ **POP: THE SANDS OF TIME** 2003 [Multi]
■ **POP2: SHADOW & THE FLAME** 1993 [Multi]
■ **PRINCE OF PERSIA** 1989 [Multi]

THE REAL HERO OF TIME IS BACK, AND THIS TIME IT'S PERSIAN-AL

PS2 **How many of you would describe *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* as 'a bunch of flaws'?** Not many, we'd guess, but we're certainly not as critical of Ubisoft's award-winning franchise relaunch as Yannis Mallat. As producer of last year's most popular multiformat platformer – and executive producer of the licence from here on in – Mallat is only too aware that accepting his title as the classic it's been held to be will lead to complacency.

"Combat was way too repetitive, if not boring at certain points," he laments. "The way the combat is linked to the difficulty curve, which is just artificial. You kill five enemies, and boom! – five more appear, and you're like 'aww, shit'. Also, there was no replay value. That was something that was really missing." Perhaps this occupational self-flagellation is the reason we believe Mallat's claims that the next *Prince Of Persia* is "more than a sequel".

"A sequel would keep the same character, art direction and content," he says. "We are going into something with much more depth, keeping the good aspects of *Sands Of Time* and also setting up a more mature experience whilst staying faithful to the licence – astonishing animation, good controls, acrobatic fighting… that's pretty much it."

Naturally, the phrase 'mature' will strike fear into the hearts of many gamers – the idea of the Prince becoming streetwise and foul-mouthed being pretty undesirable. But, thankfully, progression has been implemented through narrative and theme as well as a new, cooler outfit for the hero. *Prince Of Persia 2* begins six to eight years after the closing time-storm of the last adventure. Presupposing that opening the Sands Of Time hourglass should have killed the Prince, he owes fate his life – and now fate wants to correct the timeline by offing the 'doomed' hero. The resulting story, told using the same flashback techniques as *Sands Of Time*, sees the Prince embark on a dark crusade into the underworld to redeem himself. To this end, Ubisoft's Montreal development team is adding as many elements as it can to make the experience as immersive as possible.

"There are two kinds of new additions," says Mallat when asked how *POP2* will differ from previous instalments in the cherished series, "and the first is all the moves you wanted desperately to do." So it will now be possible to tear down a curtain like Errol Flynn, or slash wildly at an enemy while running across a wall face, both of which will no doubt add to the incredible sense of satisfaction the Prince's smooth-flowing animations gave the player in *Sands Of Time*.

"The second," Mallat continues, "is what was needed to give the game more depth. For example, [the Prince] can land on the enemy's back, grab him by the neck, and use him as a human shield. The philosophy has been kept, but we're giving more control to the player." It's worth noting that this level of control includes projectile weapons and double-sworded flamboyance, as well as moves which dissect enemies both horizontally and laterally, new throw moves and a vicious decapitation ability. Additionally, after the criticism levelled at *Sands Of Time* for ▷

FELL IN LOVE WITH A GIRL

Considering the personal connection forged between the Prince and Farrah in the last episode, it seems natural that the hero's motivation for this new adventure should be more personal. After all, much of the last title was spent either protecting Farrah or moaning about how spoilt she was. However, fans may be shocked to learn that Farrah will not be reunited with her mysterious night visitor. Instead, Ubisoft has mentioned the possibility of two female interests – one chaste damsel and one femme fatale. Sadly, producer Yannis Mallat would only answer our romance-related question by saying: "Other… elements will recreate the closeness to the Prince." Darn.

"THE STORY SEES THE PRINCE EMBARK ON A DARK CRUSADE INTO THE UNDERWORLD TO REDEEM HIMSELF"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ After netting just about every 'best of 2003' statue going, last year's premier multiformat acrobat returns to regale us with a darker tale of fate and redemption.



■ Swashbuckling antics like this now come as standard with a *Prince* game.



■ The animation is generally the same as before, but with a bit of polish.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2 CONT.

providing an uneven challenge, there will also be a host of bosses to contend with, a giant War Troll requiring a hack to the knee in order to climb up his back and skewer his brain.

Any *Sands Of Time* fans concerned that the way its narrative concluded would mean no Sands Of Time gimmick to enhance the fighting in the sequel can breathe a sigh of relief, too – if anything, the powers have been improved for *POP2*, and integrated more comprehensively into the grandiose level designs. Take, for instance, the Prince's new ability to slow down everything on screen except himself. As Mallat explains: "in *Sands of Time*, the player was able to go through the whole game without using any time powers if [they] wanted, and even without fighting, and that was a flaw, in my opinion."

By contrast, Mallat describes the fighting and platforming in *Prince Of Persia 2* as "totally embedded" into the other

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

For all the new features on *Prince Of Persia 2*, many elements of the sequel will be unchanged. Producer Yannis Mallat says that familiar aspects include "the animation, level design, the whole experience with the art direction, and how the art direction is immersive – some technological features that I think people forget, and you forget them despite that they're technological breakthroughs because they're good. I'm talking about the dynamic loading, for example… In the same way you can't buy a car any more without getting a remote to lock your door, if you had to switch back you'd be like, 'how come?'." Quite.

"THE PRINCE IS FORCED TO USE HIS TIME POWERS IN ORDER TO OVERCOME ENVIRONMENTAL OBSTACLES"

gameplay elements, and offers an example of how this new design focus extends to the practicalities of playing the game. "You have the same level design philosophy," he begins, "a question of 'how do I reach there?' rather than 'where do I go?', only here many puzzles have been implemented in a way that requires the time powers to be used in order to progress. You'll have, for example, a pressure plate on a wall, and a rope close to the wall, but you can't reach the rope by itself. You go to the pressure plate and a stone rises, so you run at the stone but you're too late. What you need to do now is slow down everything except the Prince… The gameplay actually calls for you to use the time powers." In short, the new gameplay features – though only a natural progression of those that worked so well in *Sands Of Time* – will genuinely require you to play in a different way to succeed. And that's a bold claim in an industry plagued with 'cookie-cutter' sequels.

Indeed, it seems as though Ubisoft is determined to develop every aspect of *Sands Of Time* into something more satisfying and multi-layered, including the Prince himself, who has weathered in the years between adventures. "He's a good guy," says Mallat, relishing the opportunity to give a classic two-dimensional hero a well-deserved fleshing out, "but he looks nasty, and he's nasty in the way he kills." This is never more evident than in the alterations to the time-control mechanic – the Prince is now forced to kill in order to replenish his mystical temporal powers. "In *Sands Of Time*, he was cool," shrugs Mallat, "but he was not outstanding, and we wanted to give him some attitude. In the new game, the Prince is the guy who stays quiet while everything is in turmoil around him." Strangely, one name conspicuously absent from early *POP2* publicity is Jordan Mechner, the Prince's creator who has had a hand in every *Prince* title, and who is notoriously protective of his series. "He is less involved for two reasons," says Mallat. "The first is that he is pretty confident in the team, and he trusts us. And the second one is that he may be working on the movie, so he's pretty much busy." Ironic, really – most games need heavy development to make acceptable movie scripts. Mechner may arrive at his first Hollywood meeting to find Mallat's team has done the work for him.



Multiple enemies, exploding galleons… it's all going off.



The Prince has a rugged new look and an outfit to die for, dahling.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

As well as being responsible for Tom Clancy franchises *Rainbow Six 3* and *Splinter Cell*, Ubisoft's Montreal studio has also recently brought us *XIII* and last year's *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*. *Prince* creator Jordan Mechner was apparently so pleased with the result he's given the team free rein for this instalment.

HISTORY

- **POP: THE SANDS OF TIME** 2003 [Multi]
- **RAINBOW SIX 3** 2003 [Multi]
- **SPLINTER CELL** 2002 [Multi]

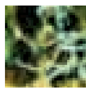


Before you can kill it, you've got to climb it. That should keep you busy for a few hours. Or days…

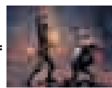


VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ARABIAN NICE


SINBAD
+

THE UNDERWORLD
x

CAPOEIRA
=

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

"THE PRINCE HAS MATURED IMMEASURABLY SINCE THE COURAGEOUS FIGHT IN PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME"

UBISOFT PRESS RELEASE

Think this looks cinematic? The film's in the pipeline. Start betting now on who gets to 'be' the Prince.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA [WORKING TITLE]


Three on one hardly seems fair, but, hey, life's not fair, sunshine.

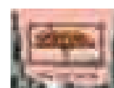

With looks like that he's going to make girls go all squiffy.

> "EVEN AFTER 18 YEARS THE LEGEND OF ZELDA NEVER STOPS CHANGING – AND THIS GAME IS NO DIFFERENT"
> *SHIGERU MIYAMOTO, GENERAL MANAGER, NINTENDO*

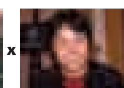
Link is set upon by multiple scaly enemies – lizards so hard they attack with their tails too.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

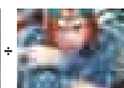
IT'S JUST A LEGEND – NONE OF IT IS TRUE


THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (NES)

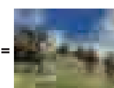
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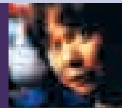

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

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PUBERTY

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THE LEGEND OF ZELDA



LEGEND PROFILE

■ Shigeru Miyamoto, the happy, smiley general manager at Nintendo and one of the world's most famous game designers, has yet again surprised the world with his new *Zelda* re-imagining. He's been a driving force behind Nintendo output since the early Eighties and practically all of his games have been triple-A titles. Bless him.

HISTORY

■ **PIKMIN 2** 2004 [GameCube]
■ **THE LEGEND OF ZELDA** 1986 [NES]
■ **DONKEY KONG** 1983 [NES]



■ Look at how detailed Epona is, and then realise there's about seven enemies attacking Link.



■ After the cel-shaded loveliness of *Wind Waker* this is quite a graphical departure.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Take down Gannondorf again in what seems to be a revamped *Ocarina Of Time* Hyrule… and look pretty damn cool about it.

A KID'S GAME? OH, GROW UP

"I am not Link, but I do know him! We are now taking you to a world where Link has grown up – a world where he will act different and look different. In order to grow, Link must not stand still and neither will I." That was Shigeru Miyamoto at E3 armed with not only the Master Sword and Shield, but with one of the most astounding game trailers of the expo. Unsurprisingly, he left thousands of people with gaping mouths, wide eyes and perhaps a little tear starting to form in the corner of their Nintendo-loving eyes. And those thousands would become millions when the trailer hit the internet…

So, bang goes the whole *Wind Waker 2* idea then; practically everyone was expecting more cel-shaded seafaring adventures, even though this looks like what everyone secretly wanted – an adult Link taking on a more mature, more evil-infested Hyrule. Amazingly, it seems that Nintendo has listened to the *Zelda* fans, taken notes and actually given them what they want. Of course, there are the mad fanatics who think that Nintendo is just pandering to the masses rather than being true to its own philosophy. Either way, the results speak for themselves. Bizarrely though, they're running on a modified *Wind Waker* engine. And no, we can't work out how that is either.

From watching the trailer, it seems that Gannondorf has been in Hyrule a lot longer than before, his evil tainting everything. Forget *Wind Waker*, where his hold on the world was a mere vague grasp as he slowly awoke from the trappings of the old Hyrule castle. This time around, his army of Moblins march downhill en masse with an almost blood-red sun setting behind them, leaving us wondering if Link is really going to be able to take on a *Lord Of The Rings*-sized force with just his Master Sword and Boomerang. And what about the huge, flaming boss swinging his red-hot chains? There's no way little Link could ever be expected to defend himself against that kind of monstrosity…

And there's more: one scene sees Link riding Epona, slashing enemies mounted on what look like wild boars, while another has Link defending himself from a barrage of flaming arrows – those ones that miss, stick into trees behind you and carry on burning. There's a definite darker side to this *Legend*, like *Majora's Mask* but without the stomach-knotting strangeness that proved to be its hook.

Until Nintendo releases any real information then, there are many unanswered questions. For instance, is this simply an *Ocarina Of Time* remake with new elements, à la *Resident Evil*, or a brand new adventure? And then there's the concern that with all the established sound effects and limited speech of previous *Zelda* titles, it's difficult to imagine how well these are going to marry with the new mature look of the game. "Hoy, big fry." See? It doesn't work. Still, it's even more difficult to be cynical about a well-loved franchise made into the best-looking, most expansive and hopefully best-executed *Legend Of Zelda* so far.

"THERE IS A DARKER SIDE TO THIS LEGEND, LIKE MAJORA'S MASK BUT WITHOUT THE STOMACH-KNOTTING STRANGENESS"

"SWORDS WILL BLEED…"

With maturity comes many physical changes. But never mind about new hairy bits – the trailer suggests that with that 'Swords…' line there might be blood involved. Do we really want to see Link bleeding? Gannondorf certainly, but not Link. There's no blood shown here but the 'sparks' when an enemy is sliced are impressive – as big as the ones in *Wind Waker* and thankfully without the musical sounds. But it does pose an interesting question: just how far is Nintendo going to push this maturity aspect? Link has a sword, that's a given, but he's never chopped anyone in half, there have been no decapitations… in fact, the most violent thing he's ever done comes at the end of *Wind Waker* – we'll not spoil it but it is unexpectedly graphic. Of course, the upside of this is the banishment of the 'kiddy' image that plagues Nintendo and its *Zelda* games.

HALO 2

THIS IS THE ONE WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR… ISN'T IT?

Hype is a strange and dangerous phenomenon. It works 24/7 for films, music and games right up until the release date, whereupon many a hyped 'thing' has known its reputation to crumble because the strength of the product couldn't support the weight of expectation. Plenty have fallen under the harsh critical analysis of disillusioned consumers, but we tell you this now – *Halo 2* will live up to its unprecedented hype.

Making a playable showing at E3 2004, Bungie's epic title is shaping up to become a moment in gaming history. The original (selling over four million copies and counting) might be the stuff of legend and Microsoft's 'get out of jail free' card for the first year of the Xbox, but *Halo 2* ups the ante again. Set in various locations, including Earth and a second Halo ring, the new game is a stunning visual example of what developers are now achieving with the Xbox's superior hardware – massive levels sprawl as far as the eye can see, all jam-packed with towering cliffs, man-made structures, flora and fauna, and all manner of extra details that are often the making and breaking of any title. Oh, and much of the scenery is interactive and destructible, just in case you were wondering.

Further details of the actual plot have been kept well under wraps by Bungie, but fans of the original will count this as a blessing. What is known is that players are put in control of the Master Chief once more, as he fights the Covenant on his home turf. However, all that time in space has given him the chance to learn some new skills that will come in handy for this game, and now the Chief can handle two weapons at once – something that most will have learnt from last year's E3 demo.

In addition to this, he can also kick Covenant off Ghosts and out of Warthogs, pick up Energy Swords and make handsome use of the new Battle Rifle or SMG. The vehicles have also undergone significant change and are now fully destructible, right down to the last tyre. Ghosts can boost across large distances – implying that *Halo 2*'s levels will be vast – and the standard Warthog now comes equipped with a rocket launcher.

However, *Halo 2*'s secondary thrust comes from its new and improved multiplayer, which is all set to leave other on and offline games in its shadow. Objective-based combat is order of the day, and now players will be able to take control of both humans and Covenant Elite across some spectacular battle maps that make full use of all three dimensions. Planned for 16-player via Xbox Live (although some sources are suggesting that *Halo 2* may be the first 32-player Live title), the combat is savage and tactical, especially with the new dual-wielding and Energy Sword features. No more whizzing around in vehicles dominating lesser mortals – those players will be able to take chunks out of your ride, making it spiral into a cliff face.

In fact, with all these added extras it's easy to forget that another ten missions of the original *Halo* would have been greeted with total adulation by adoring fans. But according to reports on Bungie's website, the entire architecture of the original game would fit into a section of one of *Halo 2*'s massive levels. The sequel will be bigger, slicker and will quite probably change the face of gaming as we know it. So where will you be on 9 November 2004?



MASTER CLAN

One key new feature for the Live element of *Halo 2* is the ability to totally customise your character. Choose different colour schemes, add battle scars to the armour, and select from a wealth of insignias to add the finishing touch to your own personal Master Chief or Covenant Elite. *Halo 2* will also fully support Xbox Live 3.0, meaning clans will be given an extra bonus through all this customisation. Imagine designing your clan's insignia, uploading it to Xbox Live, and then placing it on the arm of your *Halo 2* character. This will soon be a reality, so you'd best go Live as soon as you can.

"BUNGIE'S EPIC TITLE IS SHAPING UP TO BECOME A MOMENT IN GAMING HISTORY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Bungie
RELEASE: 9 Nov
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16

Last year it was described as "*Halo*, on fire, going 130 miles per hour through a hospital zone, being chased by helicopters and ninjas." Still sounds right to us…





Yes, that's an Energy Sword – or as it's now known, The Ultimate Anti-Son Of A Bitch Stick.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded in 1991, Bungie is one of the few companies to have received critical acclaim for every game it has released. *Halo* was originally planned as a PC and Mac title, but when Microsoft bought the company in 2000 it became the premier launch title for the Xbox.

HISTORY

- **HALO** 2001 [Xbox]
- **ONI** 2001 [PS2]
- **MYTH** 1997 [PC]

"HALO 2 WILL EXPAND ON EVERYTHING THAT MADE THE ORIGINAL GAME GREAT"
MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

Marvel at the detail in these screens. That's in-game footage, folks.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GOD INSIDE THE MACHINE



HALO + HYPE x GOD = HALO 2

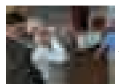
The multiplayer is guaranteed to be frantic and action-packed. Best strap yourself down…

THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY

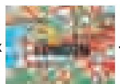
■ Mitchell's life gets complicated not long after the game starts, when a routine raid goes horribly wrong.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

COR BLIMEY, GUV – LET'S SCARPER...


THE GETAWAY

×


MORE LONDON

+


THE FUZZ

=


THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY

"BLACK MONDAY REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN THE PATH TOWARDS A FULLY DYNAMIC GAME EXPERIENCE"

NARESH HIRANI, GAME DIRECTOR, SCEE





■ As before, there's a wide range of vehicles on offer for you to drive but they've been spruced up to look more like the genuine article.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Established in 1993, SCEE's London Studio is Sony's largest internal development studio, employing over 180 staff in the heart of Soho. As well as working on key titles for Sony, the studio is also involved with developing multiplayer games for use on the PlayStation2's Network Gaming Service.

HISTORY

■ **HARDWARE: ONLINE ARENAS** 2003 [PS2]
■ **EYETOY: PLAY** 2003 [PS2]
■ **SPICE WORLD** 1998 [PSone]



■ With over 40 square kilometres of photo-realistic London laid out before you, you really can go pretty much anywhere you want.



■ The other side of the story sees small-time thug Eddie getting in way over his head, making his survival your key objective.

ANOTHER BOG-STANDARD SEQUEL? THAT'D BE JUST CRIMINAL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: London Studio (Team Soho)
RELEASE: Nov '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ *The Getaway* breaks out for one more hit, with new characters and a plot that tells the story from both sides of the fence.

Many might have written it off as a wannabe *Grand Theft Auto* clone with a firm nod to the likes of Guy Ritchie, but *The Getaway* earned the respect of PlayStation2 owners the world over. Of course, the fact that it had spent so long in development meant there was plenty of disappointment to go round as well. With expectations hitting fever pitch, the game didn't really have a chance of living up to the hype, even though it was still a fairly solid title in its own right. With a sequel now well into development then, Sony's London Studio is already looking to right many of the wrongs that players picked up on the first time round; a job that's made easier as most of the legwork has already been done.

While the original *Getaway* might have sold over a million copies, it's clear that London Studio is now seeing it as a dry run for *Black Monday*, a follow-up that promises to build on everything in the last game and more besides. It goes without saying that the foundation for this is the 40 square kilometres (over 25 miles, if you're old-school) of London that was photo-realistically recreated in *The Getaway*, even if that game was fairly linear and didn't need all that space. It's a lesson that London Studio is really trying to learn from; expanding the map to encompass 17 new landmarks (including the River Thames and even parts of the Underground), there's also the promise of many more interior locations and the need to actually explore rather than simply move from A to B for each mission.

With a lot of the work already done in terms of having a fully functional city to explore, London Studio has had plenty of time to focus on more crucial aspects such as atmospheric lighting (which, from what we've seen, is coming along nicely) and a more realistic recreation of the vehicles you can drive and the people you will meet along the way. However, the cosmetic aspects of making *Black Monday*'s London and the characters within it seem that much more convincing is only one area that Sony is keen to improve.

Aiming to deliver a cinematic experience like no other appears to be the goal here, although Sony is keen to ensure the player isn't a slave to the game's narrative because of this. As such, *Black Monday* has many of the elements that helped *The Getaway* feel like a crime movie rather than a game (such as the lack of an interface for ammo and health, and no on-screen map when exploring the streets), and has an improved storyline that not only jumps between three characters – a policeman just back on the force, a boxer-turned-thug and his overly-ambitious thief of a friend – but back and forth through time. Thankfully, the counterpoint (according to Sony, anyway) is that the player maintains control at all times as to how things play out. How you choose to complete each mission and which routes you take to get there all ultimately have an impact on how the story progresses, opening the door to all kinds of possibilities for replayability.

With London Studio also guaranteeing that many of the more obvious complaints about the original game are being dealt with (primarily the rather haphazard weapon controls and on-foot sections), it certainly sounds like *Black Monday* could turn out to be the East End gangster game we all wanted in the first place.

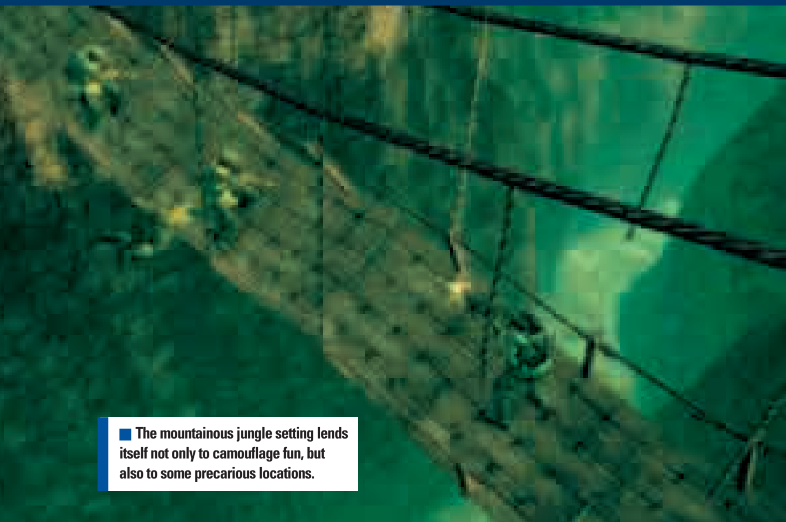


TWO SIDES AND ALL THAT

Sony is keen to emphasise that a lot of work has gone into making *Black Monday*'s gameplay and plot better than *The Getaway*'s, with the story getting particularly special attention. The idea of controlling two characters is nothing new – the original *Getaway* allowed you to experience the action as the police once you'd finished the game as lead crook-cum-avenger Mark Hammond – but *Black Monday* amalgamates this into a single story with two sides, alternating the viewpoint between small-time thug Eddie and unlucky policeman Mitchell throughout the game's 22 missions. If this meshes together it could really help convey the cinematic feel that Sony wants.

> "WITH MUCH OF THE LEGWORK DONE IN THE FIRST GAME, MAKING BLACK MONDAY LOOK FANTASTIC IS SONY'S MAIN TASK"

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER



The mountainous jungle setting lends itself not only to camouflage fun, but also to some precarious locations.



FRIENDS AND ENEMIES OLD AND NEW, AND A FEW SURPRISES FROM KOJIMA-SAN

It would be a bare-faced lie to suggest that anyone expected to leave E3 with a crystalline idea of what the latest *Metal Gear Solid* saga is all about. But besides the many heart-in-mouth moments and potentially spoiled twists revealed in the 15-minute presentation, there's certainly a great deal to mull over. The video also makes one particular point abundantly clear: we must prepare to be mightily confused.

As one unnamed female says to Snake: "The enemies we fight are only enemies in relative terms, constantly changing with the times – yesterday's good might be tomorrow's evil," it's difficult not to draw a parallel with the current war against terror. Another moment sees Snake turn to a Raiden lookalike and state: "We need to pass the torch and let our children read our messy and sad history in its light," so it's also rather hard to watch the video and not make comparisons with the contrived narrative dribblings that ruined *Sons Of Liberty* for so many. The *Snake Eater* movie was rife with references to defection, allegiance and concepts of indiscriminate loyalty and higher purpose, as well as suggesting a number of plot twists (none of which we'll be crass enough to reveal here).

> "E3 GAVE FANS A GOOD INDICATION OF HOW THE NEW CAMOUFLAGE ELEMENTS WILL MELD WITH THE GAME'S COMBAT"

Narrative background elements which were available (and unlikely to ruin further enjoyment) read as follows: In 1964, just over a year after the Cuban missile crisis, Lyndon Johnson receives a Cold War-hotline call from Vladimir Krushchev about a possible nuclear threat 'even hotter than Cuba'. It's been said that a man named Sokolov has invented a weapon and has now defected in fear of its application. So the government sends its best undercover field operative to intercept the nuclear 'Metal Gear', usurp the regime of a heavily scarred, electrically charged colonel, and defeat a maverick agent from Spetznaz's 'Ocelot' corps.

Of course, in the world of *Metal Gear* it's a given that nothing is as it seems, and indeed it seems that old habits die hard for Hideo Kojima. After over a year of debate, and talk of a faithful concept period, the legendary designer has filled his *Metal Gear* 'prequel' with oddly familiar faces, similar-sounding character names and some startling anachronisms, including hovering gun emplacements and HALO jumping from aeroplanes.

The one question most fans will be asking, however, is how *Snake Eater* differs from its predecessor, and the trailer and playable code at E3 gave a good indication of how the game's camouflage elements will meld with the combat. As well as helping him to hide in foliage, it seems Snake's patterning will also make a 'best fit' cover against man-made objects – one moment saw Snake use his Fire outfit to hide against a brick wall. Likewise, we saw Snake using the environment to good effect, jumping onto enemies from high treetops and rolling oil drums down steep slopes to mow down advancing foes, as well as manning a mounted machine gun to take on a large attack chopper.

But the most exciting moments were those that featured Snake's mano-a-mano fights with the vicious colonel and two characters looking uncannily unlike younger versions of Revolver Ocelot (a crew-cut-sporting Spetznaz general) and the enchanting Sniper Wolf. In fact, merely the sight of these two seemed to be enough to assuage any fears harboured during the last three years of development, and remind fans why they trusted the *Metal Gear* licence in the first place. 

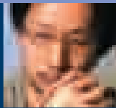
BETTER THAN THE REAL THING

For gamers expecting 'yet another' rehash of the same ideas (only in a jungle), *Snake Eater* should be a welcome surprise, as the *Sons Of Liberty* engine has been greatly improved. Leech-filled pools of water and mud move around Snake's body realistically, while spiteful-looking buzzards circle above. Snake's interaction with the environment also extends to weaponry, as he can now snipe into buildings through windows, and reverse a physical attack to use the enemy as a human shield.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '04 (TBC)
GENRE: Action Stealth
PLAYERS: 1

Snake is back, this time entering the Russian jungle to stop an evil colonel, destroy a nuclear arsenal and avert a war. At least, we think that's what it's about…



LEGEND PROFILE

Hideo Kojima needs little introduction, having become the Hitchcock of modern videogames (other auteurs are available). An industry stalwart since the mid-Eighties, Kojima lent his talents to the first *Metal Gear* title in 1987 and has since been heavily involved with many of Konami's most successful licences.

HISTORY

- **ZONE OF THE ENDERS** 2001 [PS2]
- **METAL GEAR SOLID** 1998 [PSone]
- **SNATCHER** 1990 [Mega CD]



Hurl yourself from the canopy onto an enemy below and they won't know what hit them. Unless you tell them, obviously.

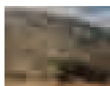
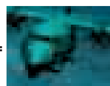


We're not entirely sure this is authentic Sixties gear, but it looks great.

"GROUND-BREAKING MOTION-CAPTURE SYSTEMS ENSURE THE MOVES… ARE FAITHFUL TO MILITARY TECHNIQUES"
KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IT HAD BETTER BE GOOD…

 x  -  = 

SONS OF LIBERTY x RAMBO - SAFARI = SNAKE EATER

JADE EMPIRE


If you'd ever fought an oversized frog, you'd also know that the crane stance was the most effective attack.

MORE KUNG FU THAN THE MATRIX

When *Jade Empire* was announced, many people were quick to slap a 'What the *Knights Of The Old Republic* developer did next' label on it. Which is fair enough, because this *is* another RPG from the same developer. But that's where the similarity ends. It already seems obvious that *Jade Empire* is going to be a lot more impressive than a mere number-two game.

Comparisons between this title and the *KOTOR* series are sadly inevitable, but if anything this game more closely follows the likes of *Fable* in terms of style. It certainly has a similar visual appeal and if you could physically measure the depth of both games' stories, we'd guess that the number of fathoms wouldn't be that far apart. *Jade Empire* also features one hundred per cent real-time combat, a feature absent from the *Star Wars* RPG. This is pretty much a necessity here, as a huge focus of the game is on martial arts and cool kung fu moves – there are over 30 fighting styles to be learned and Bioware has conducted a lot of research to ensure authenticity.

With such attention to detail being the key feature, then, it goes without saying that the animations look fantastic. Button bashing in RPGs can be difficult to get right, but having something that looks this good in motion already gets the game one step closer to success. To vary the combat a little more, you can also transform into a variety of mythical creatures; this may sound like it could break up the flow of the fighting, but since most martial arts styles are based around animals anyway the evolution seems to work quite well. In addition to these transformations you can also use a large array of weapons.

As you can imagine, considering all these possibilities, character customisation is key to *Jade Empire* – Bioware wants you to become the martial arts master of the world and it's up to you how you want that master to be. This includes a similar good/evil divide to that of *KOTOR*, with your decisions affecting the world around you. As we said, though, *Jade Empire* is turning out to be a very different game to BioWare's *Star Wars* classic – we only hope it ends up being as good.

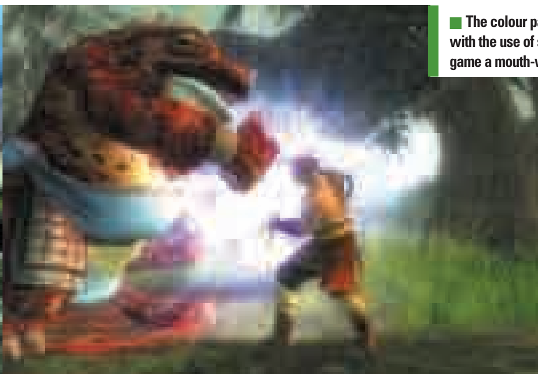
"JADE EMPIRE'S FOCUS ON MARTIAL ARTS MEANS THE ANIMATION FOR EACH CHARACTER IS INCREDIBLY FLUID"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: BioWare
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

A massive RPG set in a mythical version of ancient China full of the four M's – monsters, magic, martial arts and mystery. Marvellous.


The mythical Chinese setting has given Bioware the chance to make plenty of pretty environments.




The colour palette combined with the use of soft focus gives this game a mouth-watering look.


eMag

METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES

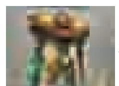
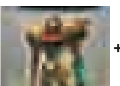
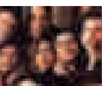
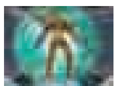




Four-player *Metroid* is something that fans have longed for for over a year – but will it live up to their expectations?

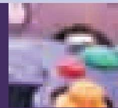
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

METROID SQUARED

 METROID PRIME ×  METROID PRIME +  FRIENDS =  METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES

The new Light Beam weapon damages the Ing Horde more effectively than any other shot.

> "THE ROLE OF DARK SAMUS IS NOT LIMITED TO A HUNTER OR THE HUNTED. IT'S MORE MYSTERIOUS THAN THAT"
>
> *KENSUKE TANABE, PRODUCER, NINTENDO*



PUBLISHER PROFILE

Nintendo is never one to do things by the book and it sometimes comes under a lot of flak for going its own way. But by constantly upping its standards, creating innovative games and not bowing to peer pressure, Nintendo is revered by some and derided by others. Will those detractors eat their words when they see this game, though?

HISTORY

- **ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS** 2004 (GameCube)
- **METROID PRIME** 2003 (GameCube)
- **STARFOX ADVENTURES** 2002 (GameCube)

SHE'S IN THE PRIME OF HER LIFE

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Retro Studios
RELEASE: Dec '04 (US: 15 Nov '04)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-4

Continue Samus' new style of first-person adventuring on a completely new planet of light and dark factions.



It's no surprise that *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* was one of Nintendo's key announcements at E3 – *Metroid Prime* is undoubtedly one of the best games on the GameCube, if not *the* best. But with anticipation so high for this sequel, how has Retro Studios improved on the already stunning original? Simple – by refining and fine tuning the main adventure, then adding the most tactical deathmatch mode seen in any game with a first-person viewpoint.

The story of Samus' next mission is intriguing: while investigating a desolate Federation ship on the planet Aether, Ms Aran's ship is disabled by an electrical storm. After crashing rather inelegantly on Aether, she finds not only carnage, but also creatures called the Ing Horde who attack Samus and steal all her special abilities, leaving you no choice but to go out and retrieve them. But as you might have guessed, this is no ordinary world…

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

In this new world there are two sides – the Light (the good guys) and the Dark (the bad guys). Rather like *Ikaruga*'s colourful method of attack and defence, Samus will have to swap weapons in order to damage the enemies sufficiently. The two new Beam weapons will fire either a Light Beam or a Dark Beam in order to take out enemies on either side of the dimensional rift. Because these new weapons are of alien origin, though, ammunition for these will only replenished by culling the forces of either side. Does this mean you'll have to slaughter the peace-loving Luminoth? Are you going to feel guilty because you've run out of ammo? Or will the end justify the means?

The planet and its inhabitants have been dimensionally split in two – one side, the Luminoth, exists in the light while the Ing Horde reside menacingly in the dark. The Horde are slowly decimating the Luminoth by destroying their light-emitting generators in the hope that they can eclipse the world and reign supreme, but it's not just the Horde you'll have to watch out for – Federation Soldiers and Space Pirates are also out for their pound of flesh (or dark matter). While most foes will only serve as cannon fodder, though, there's something darker and more evil roaming the worlds, and it's growing stronger every second…

Just how the two universes will be replicated remains to be seen, though at this point it does seem a trifle lazy – they could be the same locations just with different enemies, or you could find yourself repeating the same tasks just with a different gun. When it comes to your arsenal, familiar weapons such as the Charge Beam and Missiles are here again. As before, the Scan Visor will be integral to finding your way around the two dimensions, but we're promised more visors than in the first *Prime*, including the Echo Visor that enables you to 'see' sound. You'll also find that as you regain your stolen abilities, more routes will become available and you'll be able to access different areas thanks to the Space Jump, the Grapple Beam, the all-new Screw Attack and, of course, the Morph Ball.

"HOPEFULLY, THE DEATHMATCH MODE WON'T SULLY THE FACT THAT METROID PRIME ISN'T AN FPS"

It goes without saying that one of the big selling points of *Echoes* will be the new four-player deathmatch; you and your friends can all be Samus at the same time and enjoy blasting each other to kingdom come. Hopefully, this will turn out to be a tactical expedition in death rather than the all-out kill-fest of most FPSs, as all of Samus' abilities can be employed. Imagine hanging from a ceiling and blasting away before neatly morphing and rolling off to the safety of a darkened corner. We have a feeling that this will be the cause of many an argument, but will definitely have that 'just one more go' factor. There have been no announcements of other four-player modes such as capture the flag or team battles, though it would be foolish for Retro Studios to leave these out.

Admittedly, *Echoes* has its work cut out if it's to surpass *Metroid Prime*, and some have already expressed concern that the multiplayer mode (or modes) may detract from what made the original so great; it's not meant to be an FPS, so a multiplayer mode may spoil things. We'll find out in November…





Get your Scan Visor ready – that thing has to have a weak spot somewhere…




eMag

FAR CRY INSTINCTS


Knife to see you, to see you knife. You get the general idea.


Yes, it looks this good on the Xbox. Prepare to need *Far Cry* all over again.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
RELEASE: Nov '04 (Japan: TBC, US: Nov '04)
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-8

The console version of Ubisoft's PC smash hit once again sees Jack Carver surviving on a remote island using only his wits and an impressive arsenal.

VIOLENT DELIGHT AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

Unless you've been stranded on a desert island like *Far Cry Instinct*'s protagonist, Jack Carver, you should know plenty about this revolutionary first-person shooter by now. PC owners regarded this as the trump card in Ubisoft's recent spate of quality titles, and all console owners could do was watch in envy and go back to playing their usual shoot-by-numbers fodder. Speculation was always rife, however, about the Xbox version, right up until the fateful day that Ubisoft announced its E3 2004 line-up…

Being stranded on a tropical island may not be everyone's idea of hell, but for Jack Carver it's a living nightmare. No *Dead Or Alive* lovelies playing volleyball and frolicking by the pool here, just a bunch of sinister terrorists and mad scientists with their genetic experiment fetishes. What are the chances, eh? However, Jack's loss is the gamer's gain, as Xbox owners will now be treated to the free-roaming experience that is *Far Cry*. When *Instincts* was first announced many feared that the game would be massively dumbed down – broken into separate missions with linear gameplay. Well, fear not, as the game is intact and looking far better than such a massive undertaking has any right to on a home console.

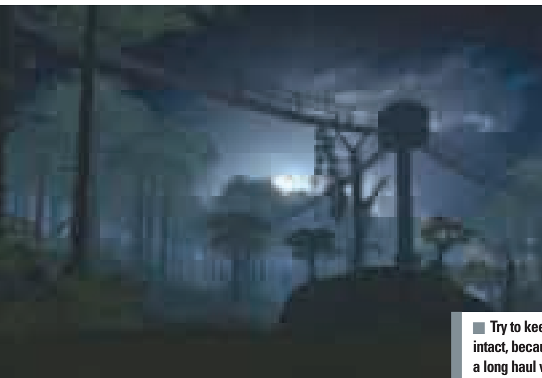
The island is still one large playground in which players can roam freely, setting traps, sneaking up on terrorists and just generally trying to stay alive. Vehicles were a large part of the original and, thankfully, they've returned – great news for Jack, who will have a whole host of new locations to explore, such as abandoned mines and aquatic labs.

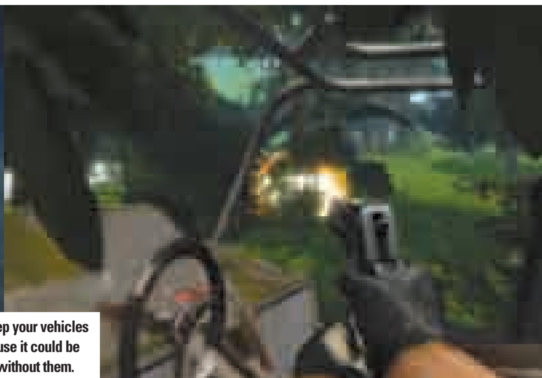
Online play is also a large part of the *Far Cry* experience, and it's good to know that this side of things is being handled by one of the forerunners in Xbox Live development. Ubisoft Montreal has stated that the game will support eight types of online play, and, as if that wasn't impressive enough, the game will also feature the Xbox's first ever level editor for console gamers, so that they can customise their online deathmatches in the same way that PC owners have been doing for years. In fact, *Far Cry Instincts* has plenty of new touches that'll make it well worth the wait for Xbox enthusiasts.

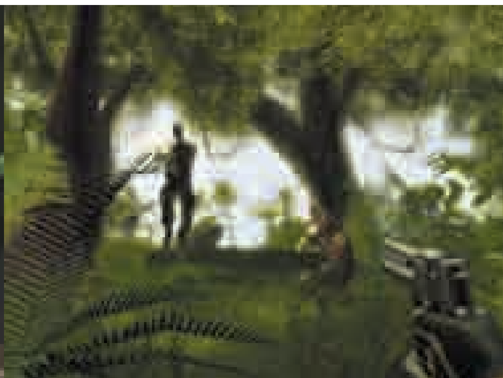
That's right PC people, Xbox owners are laughing at you with your state-of-the-art £1,500 Pentium that you needed to run this game. They're getting *Far Cry Instincts* for 40 quid plus the price of an Xbox. Tsk, pesky consoles…



"THIS LOOKS FAR BETTER THAN SUCH A MASSIVE UNDERTAKING HAS ANY RIGHT TO ON A HOME CONSOLE"




Try to keep your vehicles intact, because it could be a long haul without them.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

FAR, FAR AWAY, BUT ALREADY LOOKING INCREDIBLY GOOD

The original *Knights Of The Old Republic* has been, without a doubt, the finest RPG to grace the Xbox so far. It's quite understandable that LucasArts would want to expand on that success, but what isn't clear is why BioWare is off the map, leaving a different developer to handle the hefty task of creating a sequel. Worrying seems unnecessary, though, as BioWare has simply handed all the development tools to Obsidian, along with character models, story information… everything.

Small touches aside, *The Sith Lords* looks very much like its predecessor and the core gameplay has remained very similar. There's a fine line here between laziness and 'if it ain't broke', but we have every faith in Obsidian. The developer has been paying attention to the fans and tweaking the game engine accordingly. One of the biggest changes is the menu screen, which many felt was a nightmare to negotiate in the original. Item management in particular has been seriously overhauled and you can now apply two weapon configurations to each character, the most obvious application being a melee and ranged set-up that allows for switching with a single button press during battle.

The turn-based/real-time split on the battle system remains the same, so if you have played the first game you'll be able to slide right into the swing of things. You even begin the game as a Jedi, which is an absolute godsend as you get to fool around with Force powers (easily the most entertaining feature in the original) from the start. Sixty new powers will be available to play with this time round, such as the Force Sight that lets you see through doors and sense Force levels in the next room. Since the story for this game has you as the last remaining Light-side Jedi, it would have been easy for Obsidian to go easy on the powers but, as we said, it's the fans that have been listened to here.

But what if you're not a fan? What if you've never played the previous game? And, more importantly, what if you played *KOTOR* and finished it with one of the multiple endings? Tip your hats to the developer now, because it's been very clever in answering these questions. At the start of the game you find yourself on a ship on the way to a mining facility, at which point you have the choice of going through a training section on the ship or jumping straight to the facility – so that's the newcomers taken care of.

Once you're on the mining facility you meet the first addition to your team, Atton, who asks about what has happened over the past few years; depending on how you finished the first game, and thus how you answer him, the entire storyline is set up for this sequel. As well as changing the main storyline, your answers also affect some of the core characters that will be added to your team. You'll have a party of ten, but this isn't the full complement of characters that can join you. The beings you meet and the side quests they lead to are far more important in *The Sith Lords* and, at times, you'll come across side missions that force you to use specific characters. How this will figure alongside the main story hasn't been revealed, but you can guarantee plenty of plot twists.

With solid foundations to build upon, Obsidian has been handed a golden opportunity to make waves with its first game – and it looks like a chance it's not going to waste…



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Obsidian
RELEASE: Feb '05
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

Five years have passed and Light fights Dark again… or the other way round, depending on which way you're inclined.

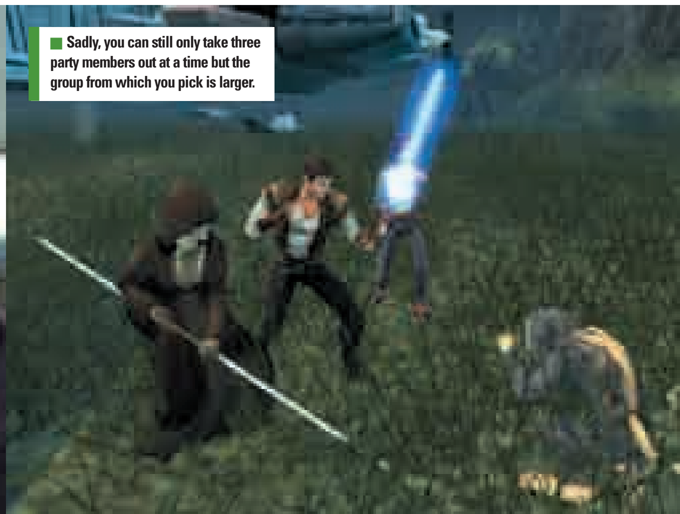
DOWNLOAD IN PROGRESS

The first game had huge potential in the shape of its Xbox Live downloadable content; potential that was completely wasted by the developer releasing the content far too late in the lifespan of the game. By the time the first downloadable content was uploaded (six months after release), most people had finished the game twice and lost interest in pursuing the story any further. Downloads have been promised for the sequel, but this time within a month or so of the release. There are no details yet, but you can no doubt expect more than just a fresh planet or two to explore.

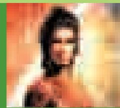
> "OBSIDIAN HAS BEEN HANDED A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE WAVES WITH ITS FIRST GAME – AND IT LOOKS LIKE A CHANCE IT'S NOT GOING TO WASTE"



There is a far grander array of battle animations this time round to prevent repetition.



Sadly, you can still only take three party members out at a time but the group from which you pick is larger.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

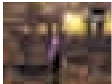
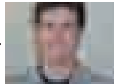
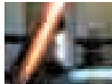
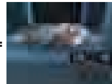
This is the first title from Obsidian, but what a game to start with. The experience is certainly there – the five founding members have previously worked on *Freelancer*, the *Baldur's Gate* series, *Icewind Dale*, *Realms Of EverQuest*, *Planescape* and more. Not too shabby a training for a game like this…

HISTORY

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS IS THE FIRST GAME BY OBSIDIAN

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MORE BOUNCE TO THE OUNCE


KOTOR
+

FRESH IDEAS
x

JEDI POWERS
=

KOTOR II

Although you're supposed to be the last Jedi, we have seen other (non-Sith) characters wielding Lightsabers.

"SOMETIMES A GAME NEEDS TO BE FUN AND SOMETIMES IT NEEDS TO BE HARD – FRANKLY, WE'VE LEARNED FROM THE FIRST KOTOR"
CHRIS PARKER, PRODUCER, OBSIDIAN

One huge change to the character models is the use of extensive facial animation to create emotions.

The Lightsaber customisation here is even more advanced, and, yes, you can play with the colours.

ADVANCE WARS: UNDER FIRE

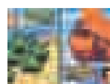
"GIVE THE ORDERS AND YOUR SOLDIERS WILL FOLLOW BEHIND YOU WHEREVER YOU LEAD OR ATTACK THE TARGETS YOU SELECT"

NINTENDO WEBSITE

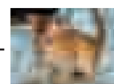
The new Flamer units are capable of taking down units 20 times their size.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WAR WAS NEVER SUPPOSED TO BE FUN


ADVANCE WARS

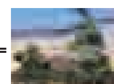
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CUTE

+


REAL-TIME STRATEGY

=


ADVANCE WARS: UNDER FIRE

Group your guys together and enjoy safety in numbers, military style.

A pleasant flight in a zeppelin can be brought to a worryingly abrupt end…

ADVANCE WARS: UNDER FIRE

GAMECUBE



COMPANY PROFILE

■ A respected and growing addition to the European wing of gaming, Kuju has fingers in virtually every gaming pie available and is in constant demand from firms the around world. The obsession with the word 'fire' has to stop, though…

HISTORY

■ **FIRE WARRIOR** 2003 [Multi]
■ **FIREBLADE** 2003 [Multi]
■ **REIGN OF FIRE** 2002 [Multi]



■ The 'rock, paper, scissors' combat mechanics appear to remain at least partially intact.



IT'S ALL FUN AND GAMES UNTIL SOMEBODY LOSES A REGIMENT

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Kuju
RELEASE: 2005
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

■ Intelligent Systems' seminal handheld strategy classics find their way onto the big screen courtesy of the UK's very own Kuju. Goodbye turn-based, hello RTS…



The more you build something up in your mind, the further it has to fall. So with two of our favourite GBA games already receiving their commendations, the *Advance Wars* series was always going to march on into that dangerous third dimension. Never, though, could we have imagined that it would spell the end of Andy and his trusty wrench, of grid-based battlegrounds and of the real thinking-man's goldmine that has been lodged in virtually every SP in this office since last year. Enter a new set of less likeable characters, an entirely new look and – the final blow – a different style of game altogether.

Shifting the *Advance Wars* universe from its sublime turn-based format into a real-time environment has all the hallmarks of the worst idea since Chris Martin decided to form a band. A closer inspection doesn't do the game any favours at this stage either, and from the total lack of the style, charm and vibrancy of the handheld titles to the scary parallels that can be drawn with 3DO's barrage of cringeworthy *Army Men* games, this simply doesn't look or even feel like the Intelligent Systems classics from which it takes its name. Tactical involvement seems limited, offering a *Pikmin*-style command area to grab troops that will then follow you, or you can jump into a tank, plane or helicopter and take control. But while it may not be *Advance Wars*, that won't necessarily make it any worse a game…

You see, much of this venom can be attributed to a flanking assault of disappointment on one side and disbelief on the other. Ever since the promise of a Cubic sequel to the *Wars* games was first dropped into our lap, there have been dreams of seeing those bubble tanks and proportionally challenged soldiers cavorting about giant maps in colours that even a Teletubby would think twice about wearing.

In its defence, what we've seen of this adopted sequel isn't that bad – vehicles and settings remain fairly true to their handheld origins and the whole thing already runs at a fair rate, showcasing some neat ideas and elements that we've not really seen this generation. We're also promised all manner of debuts, such as units that will gain experience and ranks as they battle, and new weapons and units like the Flamethrower troops that will no doubt become a staple ingredient of most squads.

Oh, how hard we're trying to like this.

Speculation before E3 was that this would retain some of its turn-based elements, perhaps in the vein of games like *North And South* that incorporate real-time action into a strategy environment. This is yet to be entirely ruled out. so we'll be hoping that the series hasn't entirely deserted its glorious roots. One possibility could be that Nintendo needed this title fairly urgently to bolster its 2005 line-up, but with Intelligent Systems toiling away on *Paper Mario 2* and its internal teams all tied up it was forced to farm the game out to an external developer who, we'd hazard, had already started work on this project under a different guise.

By this we mean no disrespect – we know that Kuju is a great studio and look forward to a more finished version of the game proving us wrong – but after the twin disappointments of *Fire Warrior* and the complete *Advance Wars* overhaul, we're going to take some serious convincing that this was a good idea…



ADVANCE TO GO

What we don't yet know is whether Nintendo's much-touted connectivity has been more or less forgotten in light of the DS out-innovating everything else ever. The strategy aspect of the series would have worked wonderfully with a few GBAs hooked up to your Cube for multiplayer modes, allowing you to move troops within the Fog of War or even into interior areas à la *Four Swords Adventure* without anyone else knowing. As it stands, there's been no announcement of any kind of multiplayer modes at all, but given the strength of the GBA multiplayer options we're hoping to see something; better still, something that uses Nintendo's hardware to its full potential.

"THIS SIMPLY DOESN'T LOOK OR EVEN FEEL LIKE THE INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS CLASSICS FROM WHICH IT TAKES ITS NAME"

POKÉMON FIRE RED/LEAF GREEN



All of the aesthetic updates of *Ruby* and *Sapphire* have been applied and enhanced here.

Our chunky favourite, Snorlax, makes a welcome return to the Pokédex.

BEGIN AGAIN, RIGHT FROM THE START

DETAILS
FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: The Pokémon Company
RELEASE: Q3 '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1 (2-5 with Wireless Adaptor)

This is what the Pokémon franchise would be like if the phenomenon started tomorrow. We like.

Collecting may be a staple ingredient of much of the software that is poured onto store shelves, but as the years roll by gamers are becoming more apathetic towards it as an unnecessary continuation of gameplay. Hidden keys, items, coins, rings, hearts, maps, feathers, packages… you name it, developers can hide hundreds of them in places that you'll never think of looking.

Meanwhile, the flipside of collecting is still thriving – the kind whereby the player has a little more involvement with his or her findings than simply an extraordinarily high number in the top-right corner of the screen. Games like *Phantasy Star Online* where collectables are often useful equipment or rare weapons still bring in the punters even with the monthly fee banged on. And at the top of the collect-'em-up tree, Nintendo's life-wrecking, battery-draining Pokémon series still rules the roost.

"BY LINKING TO OTHER POKÉMON GAMES YOU'LL BE ABLE TO ROUND UP EVERY MONSTER DREAMED UP BY NINTENDO"

Leaf Green and *Fire Red* are, on the face of it, remakes of the first two Pokémon games, *Red* and *Blue*. Story and progression work in the same way as they did nine years ago (though they haven't really changed in the meantime, anyway) and by merging this old-school experience with the best of the innovations to grace the series since then, a new duet is born.

Of course, these wouldn't be Pokémon games if they didn't rely heavily on connectivity. By linking to *Colosseum*, *Channel*, *Ruby* and *Sapphire* you'll eventually be able to round up every single monster that Nintendo has dreamed up on one cartridge for the very first time. This makes these two games the most epic Pokémon adventures to date, requiring literally hundreds of hours to be invested in order to get anywhere near a full collection.

Of course, there will be many a cry of 'rip-off' or 'milking the cash cow', and while these do seem close to the mark at times, the quality of the games is such that they're worth playing again even if you finished them many moons ago. New monsters, areas, items, trainers and events help keep the remakes fresh, and with a little assistance from the updated moves lists and battle mechanics that the last decade has brought to the series, *Leaf Green* and *Fire Red* should be a fantastic way of tying up the loose ends of a wonderful franchise. Question is: where does it go from here?



Trade in Typhlosion from *Colosseum* and Torchic from *Ruby/Sapphire* to complete the fiery threesome and go for the full 386.


eMag

BROTHERS IN ARMS



See the look on his face? He's happy now, but when the bullets start flying, expect a different expression.



The use of historical accounts mean locations are eerily accurate.

WHAT CAN WE SAY? IT'S BEEN EMOTIONAL…

War seems to fascinate the average developer. The simple fact is that it sells games, and most half-baked efforts make a decent impact on the charts, whereas things of peace and beauty such as *Ico* and *Beyond Good & Evil* fail to make a dent. So when a combat title comes along bearing all the hallmarks of a classic game you know it's going to be huge.

Brothers In Arms is one such game. According to Gearbox, Ubisoft snapped up the title mere hours after first clapping eyes on it, deciding it was a 'must-have'. Set in June 1944 at the time of the D-Day landings, *Brothers In Arms* puts you in charge of a paratrooper squad behind enemy lines. Yes, it sounds clichéd but Gearbox has an anti-cliché weapon – retired US Army colonel John Antel. He has given the developer everything it needs to create a WWII game like no other, placing it leagues ahead of mediocre efforts such as *Medal Of Honor*. Every tree, every house, every hedge, every wall you see in the game was in Normandy at the time your soldiers were. The towns you'll travel through have been recreated according to modern views and historical accounts, ensuring that this title has no flaws in the visual department.

However, the look is merely padding for the game engine. *Brothers In Arms* is a first-person, squad-based shooter, and the action is evenly balanced between command and raw FPS body bagging. Commands are context sensitive, so the player doesn't have to be an advanced military tactician to issue orders. Indeed, early missions can be completed with a bit of uncomplicated bullet spraying. Later on, though, you'll need to master squad commands to outflank, suppress and advance on enemy positions as the fight moves into better-guarded areas.

In addition to this, you'll actually want your men to live. Gearbox has spent late nights perfecting the facial expressions of your buddies, who will look nervous before a fight, upset when one of their number is shot, or terrified if they're under heavy fire. The game features around 20 characters, each with their own specific personalities, creating a genuine sense of camaraderie.

However, for all its innovations *Brothers In Arms* falls back on a few tried and tested features from earlier war titles. Certain events are semi-scripted – we saw an anti-aircraft weapon firing on planes above our squad, for example. This gun usually misses its target, and is eventually taken out by another squad of paratroopers, but occasionally it'll hit one of the aircraft, causing it to come spiralling down. But the whole game tries to immerse the player as far as possible in these events, right down to the way it allows you to take different paths through each stage of conflict.

The game's multiplayer is a large part of the package, and it supports both PC and Xbox online. The multiplayer modes have yet to be confirmed, but what's interesting is that players control three-man squads online, rather than being a lone wolf. This adds a new dimension to the experience as players can use their troops in tactical manoeuvres. The AI is exceptional, and bot players can actually shoot, so online play should be a battle between the best shot and the quickest mind. Gearbox has also promised that the missions will be short and snappy, rather than drawn-out as they can be in games like *Ghost Recon*.

Brothers In Arms is a technically sophisticated FPS for the discerning gamer. The authenticity is unparalleled, but it also represents hours of addictive gaming nirvana for anyone who ever pulled the right trigger in anger.

> "EACH CHARACTER HAS THEIR OWN PERSONALITY, WHICH CREATES A REAL SENSE OF CAMARADERIE"

SMARTER THAN YOUR AVERAGE…

The developers at Gearbox are no strangers to virtual war, but John Antel taught them a thing or two about how it's done for real. Author of seven books on the subject, and with 30 years of army service under his belt, Antel whipped the button pushers into shape. He took Gearbox on an intensive training course, demonstrating how to use weapons from WWII. He then drew up extensive maps of the whole D-Day area, detailing the events of each day, the look and feel of the battlefields, the weather and even the various stages of light given off by the moon and the sun. Now that's authentic.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Gearbox
RELEASE: Oct '04 (Japan: TBC, US: Oct '04)
GENRE: Squad-Based FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16

A new war franchise, so packed with realism and great gameplay that it'll blow far lazier games out of their cash-filled bunkers.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

Gearbox is a highly regarded company, especially when it comes to shooters. Based in Texas, it was trusted enough by Bungie to convert *Halo* to the PC, and enough by Valve to bring *Half-Life* to the PS2. With *Brothers In Arms* the studio will cement its position at the forefront of games development.

HISTORY

- **HALO** 2003 [PC]
- **JAMES BOND NIGHTFIRE** 2002 [PC]
- **HALF-LIFE** 2001 [PS2]





Sunset in the game? Then it must have been sunset at this time in the actual D-Day landings.

Your men are making a dash for it. Their smart AI ensures they won't sit around and collect toe-tags.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

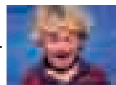
SMART WAR


WAR

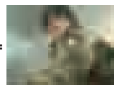
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REALISM

+


EMOTION

=


BROTHERS IN ARMS

"WE WERE BLOWN AWAY BY THE IMMERSIVE AND REALISTIC COMBAT WE EXPERIENCED WHEN PLAYING THIS GAME"

YVES GUILLEMOT, CEO, UBISOFT

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

EA REVS THINGS UP TO 88 MILES PER HOUR



Despite Free Radical's attempts to move the game in a more serious direction, the artistic style will be very familiar to fans of the series.

PS2 **Much as the thought of the games industry falling under the control of a select few chills us to the very core, you've got to hand it to Electronic Arts.** Instead of resting on its laurels, it's gone out and bought even more guaranteed success in the form of the *TimeSplitters* franchise. We just hope that in making such an aggressive move, EA doesn't attempt to stamp its own mark on the series in the process. Luckily, *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* appears to deviate very little from the path trodden in the last two outings. Taking a page out of EA's well-thumbed book, Free Radical is clearly looking to refine everything about the series to deliver a glossy, well-tuned and familiar product, rather than go out on a limb and deliver something potentially disappointing. From the strikingly familiar premise (as time-travelling hero Cortez it's once again your job to stop those dastardly TimeSplitters in their tracks) and choice of Arcade, Challenge, Story or Multiplayer modes, to the distinctive graphical style that adorns all Free Radical's titles, it really does feel like we've been here before.

Of course, whether you see that as a bad thing or not depends entirely on your opinions of *TimeSplitters 2* – to us, it's still one of the more enjoyable console FPS games. Some rather minor changes aside – such as the chance to fight alongside future or past versions of yourself, and a slightly heavier emphasis on co-op play – we suspect that the simple enhancements of a tried-and-tested formula will be more than enough to interest gamers.

However, the biggest selling point is likely to be online play – not only can up to 16 people battle against one another, but the enhanced Map Maker mode also allows for data sharing between players. Being able to construct your own levels always appealed in the last game, but the option to then upload your map and allow people from all round the world – rather than just your friends – to play it is something that console gamers have never had until now. Fingers crossed, it will be the icing on a cake that's already sounding rather tasty.

> "ALTHOUGH EA HAS BOUGHT INTO THE SUCCESS OF THE SERIES, WE HOPE IT LETS FREE RADICAL WORK ITS MAGIC IN PEACE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Free Radical Design
RELEASE: Q1 '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-16 Online)

More FPS time-travelling action, this time with the option for online play.



Boss battles see you going up against time-travelling adversaries, all of whom will prove particularly tough.


eMag

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2



Locations are more varied than before, and they look great.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

JUST ADD TIME-WARPING GIRL POWER

VIEWTIFUL JOE + THE MATRIX + SPICE GIRLS = VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

GAMECUBE/MULTIFORMAT

DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Capcom is the king of franchises. First there was *Mega Man*, which who still has a hardcore following to this day. Then came *Resident Evil, Onimusha, Devil May Cry*… In fact, it seems that everything Capcom touches turns to gold. And now Joe is attempting to eclipse them all.

HISTORY

■ **ONIMUSHA 3** 2004 [PS2]
■ **RESIDENT EVIL 4** 2004 [GameCube]
■ **DEVIL MAY CRY 2** 2003 [PS2]

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube, PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Capcom returns with a sequel to one of last year's biggest and most innovative GameCube releases. Can lightning strike twice?

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPERHERO IS BACK… AND SO IS HIS MISSUS

Last year, among all the sequels, remakes and rip-offs that flooded the market, one GameCube title proved a quirky, challenging and unique treat. Those who gave *Viewtiful Joe* a chance soon found themselves charmed by the cel-shaded hero on a quest to save his lady. Considering the success of the original game, then, a sequel was inevitable – as was its transition from being a GameCube exclusive to also being made available on the PlayStation2. Thankfully, this means that all the Sony zealots who laughed at the 'childish look and simplistic gameplay' of *Viewtiful Joe* are going to need a very large spoon to eat their words as Joe prepares to impress even more gamers than before.

The first change this time around is that, of course, Silvia has been saved and so instead of the traditional 'damsel in distress' storyline of last time, Silvia fights alongside our hero – just as well, as you need all the help you can get against the enemies that come thicker and faster than before. Also, there are now huge creatures such as dragons that fill most of the screen – not since the glory days of *R-Type* have we seen such ridiculously tough challenges. As well as large bosses, the game is again packed with different types of bizarre, lesser foes – overall, *Viewtiful Joe 2* features over 40 different types of enemy, so it looks like your trigger finger will get no rest until the end credits roll. While the game keeps the same 2D/3D look of the original, the sequel also boasts more stages to play through as well as a far more varied selection of environments. This time, Joe's adventures take place across snowy mountains, jungle areas and even in outer space.

Of course, much of the fun of the original game came from the fact that you could manipulate time to make sections of the game easier – for example, if a gun slinger was attempting to fill you with lead you could slow down time to avoid the bullets and even send them back where they came from, speeding time up as you did so to increase the damage done. Unsurprisingly, all of Joe's old VFX powers return (Slow, Mach Speed and Zoom In are all here) as well as a brand new, multipurpose VFX power known as Replay. If you manage to pull off a particularly devastating shot, then why not replay the punch three times, greatly increasing the damage? If, on the other hand, you're running low on health, then the next time you reach one of Joe's iconic Hamburgers, you can use Replay to receive three times the extra health.

The only time the Replay can work against you is if you accidentally trigger it at the same time as you're getting hit as this will result in you taking three times the punishment, giving your foes a definite advantage. When you're not using the VFX to gain the upper hand, the enemies themselves can be used as weapons; by grabbing hold of them you can swing them around and launch them into other foes.

With all this and more (including the addition of several transformation forms for Joe's trusty vehicle, the Six Machine), you can't say that Capcom hasn't tried to stuff plenty of new elements into this sequel. Those who never got to experience the Cube-exclusive original are in for a treat, and if you're already familiar with Joe then you should be rubbing your hands with glee at the prospect of more of the same, only better.

STAY VIEWTIFUL

Sony gamers might want to get up to speed before the sequel hits the PlayStation2. While one way would be to pick up a cheap GameCube and experience the game as it was originally intended, another option is to pick up the long-rumoured PS2 version which now appears to be a reality. However, instead of merely porting the game to the PS2, Capcom has something rather special planned; making use of some crossover-style gaming, *Devil May Cry's* Dante makes an unexpected cel-shaded appearance. And you know what? The new look suits him…

"THOSE WHO NEVER PLAYED THE CUBE-EXCLUSIVE ORIGINAL ARE IN FOR A TREAT"



■ Silvia's a chopsocky hero too, which is nice.

DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NEW YORK





Special lighting effects ensure that your bling is always at its most blinging.



DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, GameCube, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Aki
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-4

EA and grappling legends Aki join forces again to create the most brutal and varied 'wrestling' game yet. And there's not a spandex suit in sight.

MOMMA SAID KNOCK YOU OUT

PS2 **"From the day me born jah ignite me flame, gal a call me name and it's me fame, it's all good girl turn me on 'til a early morn', let's get it on."** This truly is a masterstroke on EA's part – any game in which you can kick, punch and slam Sean Paul until he can't even muster a "hear me now" should have the punters queuing around the block. Indeed, it'll be this kind of rivalry across the board that will help shift units, and with the emphasis moving away from *Def Jam Vendetta*'s wrestling and onto general pugilism, all the mental barriers are being dropped to make *Fight For New York* as accessible as it can be.

Stars of the urban scene and fictional creations alike can now take on one of five unique fighting disciplines – from traditional wrestling to martial arts – and without the trappings of a ring or referee, EA and Aki have enjoyed the freedom in which to perfect a much grittier brawler. This even extends to the bloodthirsty crowd who can throw wayward enemies back at their opponents, pelt the fighters with junk or even hurl in weapons to turn the tide of battle.

Furthermore, environments can be used as weapons themselves and whether you find yourself hurling Ice-T under a moving subway train, whipping Ludacris into a light fitting (which in turn makes the arena darker) or slamming our good friend Sean through a concrete pillar, you can always count on some more good old-fashioned violence.

As much as EA may be accused of perfecting the shameless annual update, to call *Fight For New York* anything but the polar opposite would be criminal. Every area has been addressed to ensure that the game not only stands up on its own but also builds on the great foundations set by *Vendetta*.

Complaints about the lack of a character creation mode have been heard and acted upon, as has the mysterious absence of Xbox representation last time around. Even the countering system has been reworked to make for fairer fights (as fair as throwing someone under a train can be, anyway). Combined with a branching storyline, a huge cast of fighters and real-time deformation of both characters and arenas, only the visual style really lets on that this is even related to *Vendetta*.

As long as Aki can successfully balance such varied fighting styles with its obvious wrestling bias, scrapping fans should be in for quite a treat later this year.

"SELECT A STYLE THEN CHOP, SLAM OR CHOKE YOUR WAY TO THE TOP – SIMPLE AS THAT"



Win the favour of the crowd and it could pay off in the long run…



Arenas are packed with stuff to break but none of them seem particularly, well, safe.


eMag

GRAN TURISMO 4

AFTER SUCH A LONG WAIT IS THIS STILL THE ULTIMATE DRIVING SIMULATOR?

PS2 **The *Gran Turismo* series has the almost unique ability to appeal far beyond the realms of your 'average' gamer – it's seeped into the consciousness of anyone who's dreamed of caning their sportscar of choice around a racetrack.** Although satisfying your need for speed in a virtual world is not a new concept, the impeccable simulation style of the *GT* franchise means it doesn't just offer the chance to live out your motoring fantasies; the accurate car models and yet-to-be-surpassed handling meant that those lucky enough to have bulging wallets used *Gran Turismo* to test drive flashy motors before splashing out the real thing. Early versions of *GT4* were even used to train aspiring race drivers, for god's sake. *Gran Turismo* isn't just a game, it's an institution, and – in a world where speeding is a crime akin to eating babies – it's the chance for release that so many petrolheads crave.

To say that *Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec* was flawless, however, is taking things a little too far. Its straight-laced aloofness made the game feel cold and clinical. Opposing drivers, other than having the ability to follow the racing line and recover from spins, had virtually non-existent AI, and your inability to save time-consuming series races halfway through meant that an all-or-nothing attitude was needed to get the most from the GT mode. And don't even get us started on the supposedly realistic engine noises…

> "THE CHANCE TO PROVE YOUR PROWESS ONLINE WILL CREATE SOME COMPETITIVE VIRTUAL MOTORING COMMUNITIES"

Gran Turismo 4, for all its release date-delaying sins, has the chance to rectify all this, to restore some of the fun factor and re-affirm its position as the 'Ultimate Driving Simulator'. While anticipating the arrival of *GT4*, fact lovers have plenty of information to keep them busy: a hundred new tracks, over 500 new cars (including the pleasing return of European classic motors as well as Japanese vehicles), an all-new, hyper-sophisticated physics engine and advanced environment mapping.

There's still the annoying absence of damage models, but *Gran Turismo 4* does demonstrate some small but significant improvements: slinkier, sharper graphics that tone down the gaudy colours of *A-Spec* and replace them with more realistic hues; smoother running so you can hurtle through the heavily detailed streets of New York without so much as a frame-rate splutter; more convincing and varied tracks, too – the challenge of negotiating the cobbled streets of the Citta di Aria is a vastly different experience to the aforementioned NY track, and the Grand Canyon rally course is a riot of crowds and flying dust.

The online capabilities are also a much sought-after addition – the chance to race six other drivers and prove your prowess at a game many practise for years will prompt some highly competitive virtual motoring communities… and no doubt a bit of backlash from those who enjoyed previous titles with the aid of an i-Link and won't be able to now.

Gran Turismo 4 is far from revolutionary – the racing genre now has (or will soon have) titles such as *PGR2*, *Enthusia Professional Racing* and *Forza Motorsport* among its ranks – but that's unlikely to matter come this game's release. If you want to drive the world's fastest and best-looking cars, and for it to feel as damn near as real as a PS2 can muster, this will be the place to turn.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-6

The greatest console racing simulator is back again, but after so many delays we have to cross our fingers and hope it's still got the magic…

SO WHAT'S NEW?

It's been three years since the release of *A-Spec*, so apart from the odd tweak to the graphics and physics engines, what exactly has Polyphony been doing to improve an already successful formula? Obviously, the new vehicles – ranging from Japanese and European classics to current motors and concept cars of the future – are a given, as are the new tracks, including New York City, Fuji Speedway, Tsukuba Circuit, Grand Canyon, Costa di Amalfi and the notoriously challenging Nürburgring. But other than the frivolous GT Photo mode (where you and your car conduct photo shoots in front of tourist locations), and beefed-up Career and Arcade modes, not much has changed. But when the original package is so good, who's complaining?



Mitsubishi, Subaru, Nissan… the Japanese *GT* mainstays are back and in rude health.



New cars, new tracks, new tin of barley sweets in the glove compartment…

DEVELOPER PROFILE

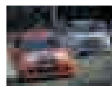
Formerly known as Poly Entertainment, this SCEI internal developer was responsible for the PSone title *Omega Boost* before moving onto its monumentally successful *Gran Turismo* series in 1997. After *GT*'s success, the studio was given more freedom and renamed Polyphony Digital. Led by Kazunori Yamauchi, the team is one of Sony's greatest assets.

HISTORY

- **GRAN TURISMO 3 A-SPEC** 2001 [PS2]
- **GRAN TURISMO 2** 1999 [PSone]
- **GRAN TURISMO** 1997 [PSone]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD


GRAN TURISMO 3
+

MOTORSHOWS
+

CLASSIC CAR MAGAZINE
=

GRAN TURISMO 4

If a new car has made it to the showrooms and has a bit of oomph, you can be sure it's in *GT4*.

"GRAN TURISMO 4 CAN NOT ONLY BE SEEN AS A GAME, BUT AS A UNIQUE MEDIUM TO LEARN, ENJOY AND EXPERIENCE AUTOMOTIVE CULTURE LIKE NEVER BEFORE"
KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI, PRESIDENT, POLYPHONY DIGITAL




When they described the courses as 'photo-realistic' they sure weren't kidding.

JUICED



The sensation of speed is palpable even in this still – *Juiced* promises a wild ride.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Acclaim
DEVELOPER: Juice Games
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2 (online TBC)

Combining the shiny with the oily, *Juiced* hopes to meld arcade street racing with technical detail and modification.

SOD THE ENGINE, HOW BIG ARE THE SPEAKERS?

"A GREAT DEAL OF THE BATTLE JUICED FACES WILL BE FOUGHT IN THE FIELDS OF MARKETING AND BRAND AWARENESS"

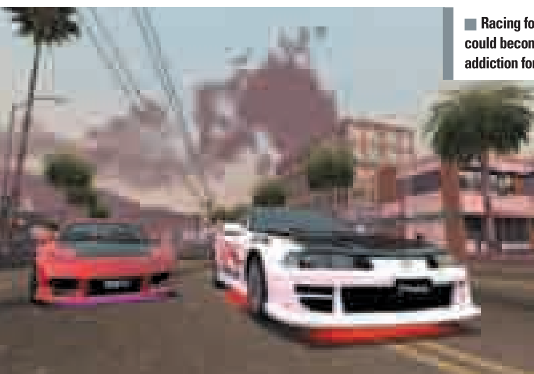
We're quite used to receiving the sheets of concentrated hyperbole that constitute a game's press release. We sometimes don't even guffaw uncontrollably upon reading them. But every so often a title arrives with a claim so bold as to leave us speechless. One such game is Acclaim's *Juiced* which, in addition to its 50 licensed vehicles, would have us believe it offers a possible 7.2 trillion unique custom car creations. Obviously, we can't validate this claim – we can't even comprehend how large a number 7.2 trillion is without feeling dizzy – but it at least indicates the scope Juice Games is aiming for with this street-racing title.

Early word surrounding *Juiced* has been extremely positive. Juice Games has implemented realistic damage physics as well as the many completely controllable custom variables. The developer has also reportedly devised a system of 'progressive, non-linear' gameplay, with a number of original game modes, including the ability to win pink slips in multiplayer races, thereby depriving your friends of their most prized bodyshells. Additionally, the whole *Juiced* package carries a glossy sheen that should see it stay bumper-to-bumper with the inevitable *Need For Speed: Underground* sequel later this year.

Of course, that's easier said than done, but here's where Juiced's online elements should come into play. The team has put a great deal of consideration into making its title rev louder than its competitors, including team-based crew racing and head-to-head championship face-offs, which can also be undertaken with the added pressure of a pink-slip wager. Juice Games will also be compiling online world statistics rankings, with a whole pit-full of varied ranking criteria updated on a race-by-race basis.

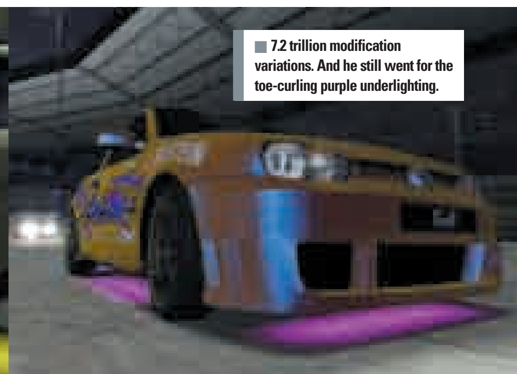
Of course, quality is no barometer for success in the often superficial, bling-centric world of high-octane racing, and a great deal of the battle *Juiced* faces will be fought in the fields of marketing and brand awareness. Either way, we'll find out around autumn whether Acclaim's attempt to join the Burberry brigade skids into first place.







Racing for pink slips could become a serious addiction for online racers.



7.2 trillion modification variations. And he still went for the toe-curling purple underlighting.

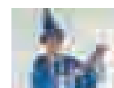
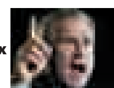

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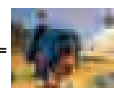
SUDEKI

"SUDEKI PUSHES THE LIMITS OF WHAT AN RPG CAN BE BY PROVIDING BIGGER WORLDS AND MORE POWERFUL HEROES"
CLIMAX WEBSITE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WE REALLY HOPE THAT WE'RE PROVED WRONG…


RPG
x

WESTERN INFLUENCE
+

DISAPPOINTMENT
=

SUDEKI





■ Combat using either Ailish or Elco is more akin to a first-person shooter than an RPG and, to be honest, we're not all that keen on it…

DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1988 by Karl Jeffery, Climax's story is one of success. The company has expanded from its humble roots to employ over 300 people in six divisions throughout five locations worldwide – Los Angeles, Portsmouth, Brighton, Nottingham and London – and is continuing to expand on a regular basis.

HISTORY

- **MOTO GP 2** 2003 [Xbox]
- **THE ITALIAN JOB** 2003 [Multi]
- **SUPERBIKE 2000** 2000 [PSone]



■ Each special ability (from basic Skill Attacks to all-powerful Spirit Strikes) comes with a stylish cut-scene to illustrate the destruction.



■ Talking is vital to advance the story and acquire new items but don't waste time chatting to everyone.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft Games
DEVELOPER: Climax
RELEASE: July '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ Climax's RPG spectacular promises to rejuvenate the genre on the Xbox, but we've got a feeling it won't be the wonder that everyone's expecting.

GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT… DON'T THEY?

'It'll be ready when it's ready.' Not many developers have the freedom to make such promises, and those that do risk incurring the wrath of gamers if their eagerly anticipated title fails to live up to expectations. Such is the tightrope that Climax has walked with *Sudeki*. Those with long memories will know that it was first shown at E3 2002, but this epic RPG is now finally nearing release.

We've had time to play through everything the preview code has to offer (just over three hours of action, according to our watches), but having expected to find that *Sudeki* delivers on all its promises, the truth is that we're a little disappointed. There's no denying that Climax has created a sprawling and beautiful world – every environment is rich and detailed, which sets the scene perfectly for what you'd expect to be a deep and rewarding adventure. Visual style aside, however, we can't help feel that the only word to describe *Sudeki*'s gameplay so far is 'generic', with 'inconsistent' coming a close second.

The combat system, for example, feels decidedly unpolished, almost to the point of being annoying. In principle, it should work fine; players can wade right in and attack enemies hand-to-hand, or access a variety of special skills and magical attacks (the number of which increases as you level up each character) to really dish out some punishment. In practice, though, the battle sections – which force players to slaughter everything before being able to leave the area – feel more like clumsy set pieces punctuated with gore.

Tal and Buri's combat styles (which use a third-person viewpoint) are sluggish and have a combo system that often hinders the player rather than helping thanks to your inability to focus on individual enemies, and the combo animations are drawn out and easily interrupted by an opposing attack. Ailish and Elco, on the other hand, use a first-person view that seems totally out of place compared to the rest of the game – especially considering fighting battles like this turns the game into a poor excuse for an FPS.

And then there's the core gameplay itself which, rather than being magical and brimming with charisma, turns out to be a Western homogenisation of every generic RPG element ever invented. The problem seems to be that by offering almost cookie-cutter characters with little charm (the roguish soldier, the prissy princess), obstacles that present little challenge and a world that, despite the free-roaming appearance, is actually fairly linear, the air of magic and intrigue that every good RPG needs is diluted. It's certainly not bad, but considering how anticipated *Sudeki* is, it's still incredibly disappointing.

Of course, we're optimistic that *Sudeki* will prove us wrong upon its release – after all, not only is this unfinished preview code, but it only offers a small taster of Climax's claimed 20-hour-plus adventure. But with Microsoft saying that the game is now around 85 per cent complete, it's hard to imagine that anything beyond marginal problems such as frame rate, lip sync, object interaction and collision detection – all of which abound in the preview code – are being dealt with right now. The bottom line is that if *Sudeki*'s gameplay turns out to be as bland all the way through as it is in the code we've played, we could have spent the best part of three years getting excited over nothing…

BACK TO BASICS

Perhaps our biggest concern with *Sudeki* is that the puzzles appear to be incredibly simple for anyone but the most inexperienced RPG player. Focusing mainly on the fact that each member of your party has a unique ability (Tal can pull crates, Ailish's magic reveals hidden areas, Buri can climb walls and Elco flies with his jetpack), the idea of having to return to past areas to reap rewards is nothing new. However, there's just no mystery involved; it's patently obvious where each ability can be used, meaning you'll simply go through the motions with any challenge you meet just so you can advance. Will the finished game offer more variety? We hope so…

"SUDEKI SEEMS TO HAVE TOO MANY MOMENTS WHERE YOU'RE JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS"

BURNOUT 3



You think this *looks* fast? Wait until you find out how fast it feels…



FOUR-WHEELED WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

PS2 **When the first *Burnout* appeared on the PlayStation2 in 2001, we doubt that even Criterion could have guessed how popular it would become.** As an evolution of the *OutRun* school of arcade racers, *Burnout* struck a chord with gamers who lapped up the pick-up-and-play style, spectacular crashes and astonishing sense of speed. When everyone else was channelling their efforts into creating simulators to match the likes of *Gran Turismo*, *Burnout* proved that you didn't have to know your camber settings from your carburettors to enjoy a racing game.

Obviously, the success of *Burnout* demanded a sequel and the pressure was on Criterion to prove it was more than just a flash in the pan. To the surprise of many, *Burnout 2: Point Of Impact* improved on the original in every possible way, making the game better looking and faster, and the crashes even more astonishing. A point had been proved – when it came to adrenaline-soaked arcade racers, these boys knew their stuff. This, of course, could go some way to explain why publishing behemoth Electronic Arts stepped in to take it off Acclaim's hands. Why Acclaim would give up such a franchise, and why EA would take charge of a title that could poach sales from its *Need For Speed* series seems odd, but take charge it did.

> "VEHICLES EXPLODE INTO FIREBALLS, TRUCKS SPILL THEIR PAYLOADS ONTO THE ROAD AND YOU GET TO BASK IN THE AFTERMATH"

With such a powerhouse now behind the *Burnout* name, we expect nothing but the best for the third instalment, and, from first looks, *Burnout 3* has gone all-out to improve on its predecessor. For a start, there are many more cars – they may look suspiciously like licensed models, but we're assured they aren't. There are also more tracks, more game modes and mini-games – such as the 'Last Man Standing' Elimination mode, Fastest Lap mode (with its unlimited Burnouts) and return of the awesome Crash mode – an unfaltering 60fps and, of course, bigger crashes.

Ah, the crashes. While replays in the first game were an annoyance, and in the second the cars fell apart like they were made of Lego, the crashes in *Burnout 3* are truly stupendous. Real-time damage that shapes the car appropriately to the collision, huge trails of sparks so fierce you'll need a welder's mask, particle effects that shower the screen with debris upon impact… you'll want to crash almost as much as you'll want to win, which is handy because *Burnout 3* encourages carnage.

In previous games you were rewarded for driving like a hooligan; now you receive bonuses for causing as much mayhem as possible. The more outrageous the accident, the more points you receive. The same goes for the damage you inflict upon others; collide with one of the many new varieties of traffic and gasp in awe at the consequent bedlam – vehicles explode into fiery wreckage, trucks spill their payloads and you get to bask in the messy aftermath.

Anyone after multiplayer racing beyond the two-player split-screen mode will also be sated (both on PS2 and Xbox) thanks to the online mode which caters for up to six players simultaneously. If you thought the improved AI was taxing, wait until you're up against five like-minded lunatics…

When many considered *Point Of Impact* to be near-perfect seat-of-your-pants racing, the various and well-implemented improvements in *Burnout 3* mean only one thing – this is going to be huge.



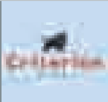
CRASH-ISFACTION

Previous *Burnout* games weren't hugely sympathetic when it came to making contact with other vehicles – hit something too hard, crash, lose precious time. In *Burnout 3*, however, prangs mean prizes. How often have you had to resort to weaving across lanes of traffic to prevent computer AI from overtaking you? Well, now you can simply squash the blighter into the Armco. Not only will you get the chance to snigger wickedly as the wreckage tumbles off into the distance in your rear-view mirror, you'll get points for doing so – and extra Burnout Boost. This 'crash and burn' style (as EA puts it), promises to deliver more explosive action and competitiveness than ever before. Imagine how well that must work when playing online…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Criterion
RELEASE: Sept '04
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-6

Drive like a maniac at ludicrously high speeds and choose whether to win the race or cause as many accidents as possible. Either way, you get a pat on the back.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Based in sunny Guildford, Criterion began developing titles in the late Nineties. Although its first batch of games were diverse titles such as *Sub Culture* and *Trickstyle*, its breakthrough into the mainstream with *Burnout* in 2001 and recent move from Acclaim to EA confirm its position as a triple-A developer

HISTORY

- **BURNOUT 2: POINT OF IMPACT** 2002 [Multi]
- **BURNOUT** 2001 [Multi]
- **REDLINE RACER** 1998 [PC]



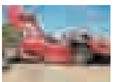
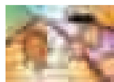
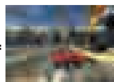
Insurance men around the world smiled wryly and wrung their hands…



That's not a Mustang racing against a Mitsi Evo. No sirree, not at all…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LIVE FAST, DIE IN A GLORIOUS FIREBALL

 +  -  = 

FAST CARS + LUNATIC DRIVERS - ROAD SAFETY = BURNOUT 3

"BURNOUT 3… NOW FEATURES A UNIQUE 'CRASH AND BURN' RACING CONCEPT AND A ONE-OF-A-KIND SPECIAL EFFECTS ENGINE THAT DELIVERS SPECTACULAR VISUALS"

EA PRESS RELEASE

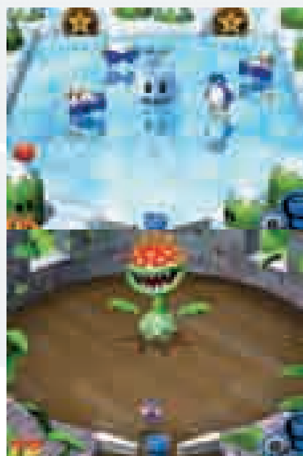
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

Mario Pinball

GO ON, MARIO – BE THE BALL

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Fuse Games
Genre: Pinball
Players: 1



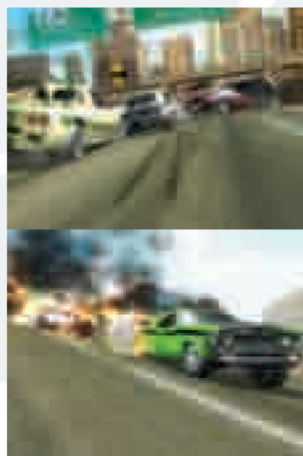
It's not often that you find yourself being turned into a ball and drawn into another dimension, but wouldn't you believe it that's exactly what's happened to poor old Mario. Yes, it's another unlikely premise from Nintendo, but then considering it appears to be attached to a high-quality pinball game for the GBA we can turn a blind eye; particularly as, unlike regular pinball games, *Mario Pinball* has a fair bit of creativity. Featuring visuals reminiscent of *Super Mario Sunshine* (something that's rather impressive for a humble GBA) and tons of challenges laid out before you, it sounds like it might just work. Considering how much fun *Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire* was, we don't doubt it will.

RELEASE DATE: October '04

Crash 'N' Burn

DRIVING BURNOUT OFF THE ROAD

Format: PS2/Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Climax
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-4 (1-16 Online)



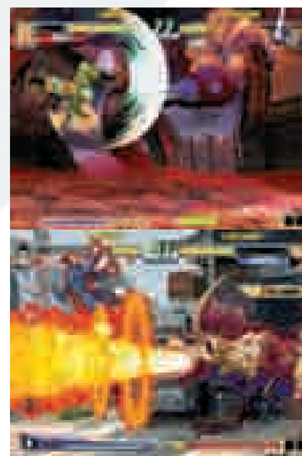
Call us cynical, but *Burnout* has a lot to answer for – it was original when it first came out, but now you can't move for attitude-filled, high-speed racers. The latest example is *Crash 'N' Burn*, which on paper sounds exactly like a hybrid of *Need For Speed: Underground*'s car customisation and *Burnout*'s reckless regard for any other vehicles on the road. Racing nitrous oxide-fuelled cars through the back streets of Miami, San Francisco, LA and New York, the concept of coming first and leaving everyone else as a pile of scrap isn't anything new. However, the addition of 16-player online racing and some rather nice customisation features could be enough to tip the balance in Eidos' favour.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '04

Capcom Fighting Evolution

THE VERY BEST OF THE BEST

Format: PS2/Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up
Players: 1-2



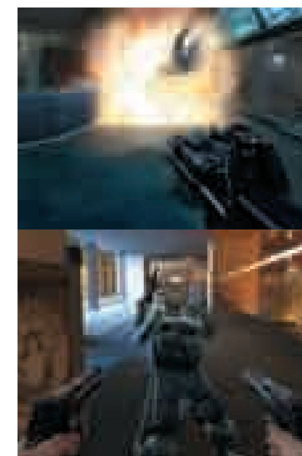
When Capcom pulled out of the arcade market, everyone assumed that we'd seen the last of any 'new' *Street Fighter*-style beat-'em-ups. But now *Capcom Fighting Evolution* (or *Fighting Jam*, depending on who you talk to) looks set to prove everyone wrong. Taking a selection of fighters from several Capcom beat-'em-ups such as *Darkstalkers*, *Street Fighter III* and *Red Earth*, the game offers the two-on-two fighting of *Marvel Vs Capcom* but with switches only occurring at the end of a round. While this all sounds fine, though, we can't help thinking that having only ten main characters – most of whom are rather obvious choices – is rather limited for a Capcom fighter. Still, you never know…

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

OH, EA – WHEN WILL YOU EVER LEARN?

Format: PS2/Xbox/Cube
Origin: US
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA LA
Genre: FPS
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



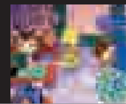
Bond fans, look away now – EA's new title makes a mockery of everything you hold dear. *Rogue Agent* sees you as a disgraced MI6 agent (now working for Auric Goldfinger) who loses an eye in a battle with Dr. No (yes, really) and has it replaced with a synthetic 'golden eye', which will no doubt offer every kind of visual enhancement known to man. By managing to destroy Bond chronology totally and cash in on the *GoldenEye* name at the same time – because you know many will think it's a proper sequel – *Rogue Agent* sounds like some kind of cruel EA joke. Still, we're willing to hold fire for now; we just hope there's actually a game worth playing underneath it all.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '04



Announced – TRON 2.0: Killer App [Xb]

■ Having enjoyed relative success on the PC, Monolith's take on the movie franchise will be appearing on the Xbox, along with improved visuals and AI, and compatibility with Xbox Live.



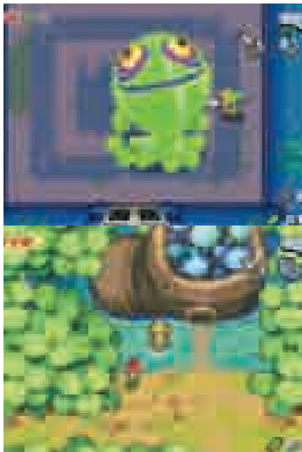
Announced – Animal Crossing [GC]

■ Better late than never. It's been out everywhere else for longer than we care to mention, but Nintendo's real-time life simulation is finally coming to Europe on 28 September. Yay.

Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap

HE'S SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Capcom
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1



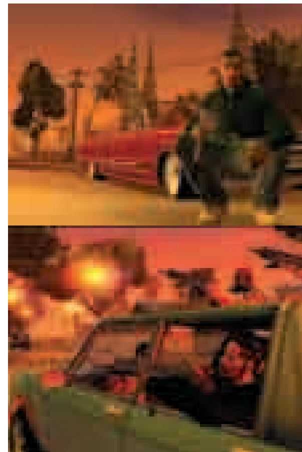
With the world currently going crazy for the new GameCube version of *Zelda* that Nintendo has teased us with, we get the feeling that Link's other new adventure – for the GBA – has been somewhat overlooked. Based on the enhanced *Four Swords* engine used in the GBA version of *Link To The Past*, the new microscopic world of the Minish people (into which Link has to shrink using the Minish Cap of the title) appears to have plenty of innovation – we've already seen rotating dungeons, new gadgets for Link and the mysterious Kinstones that have to be fused together in order to save the day. With Capcom at the helm once more (thanks to its success with the *Oracle* series), we've got high hopes for this one.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

GTA: San Andreas

YOU GOT A PROBLEM, ESSE?

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: UK
Publisher: Rockstar Games
Developer: Rockstar North
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1



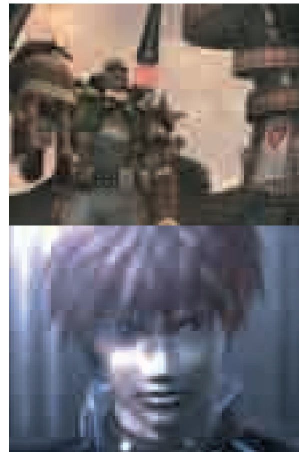
There's only one word to describe what Rockstar has revealed of its hugely anticipated *Vice City* follow-up – orange. Of course, the handful of released screenshots give almost nothing away about how *San Andreas* will improve the series, and while we suspect that many will make a big deal of what is obvious (such as the chopper-style bike and multiple characters taking part in drive-by shootings), there's very little here to get overly excited about. Needless to say, Rockstar has once again guaranteed PlayStation2 exclusivity for the title – although how long the deal is for, given the change of attitude with Xbox *GTA*, is unclear. For now, though, there's no doubt Sony can expect even more huge sales come October…

RELEASE DATE: October '04

Shadow Hearts: Covenant

MIDWAY PUTS A SPELL ON YOU

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Aruze
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



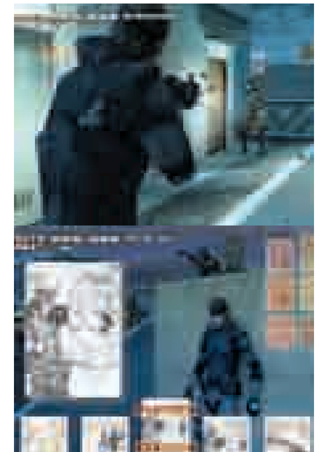
The trend for Western publishers releasing Japanese RPGs is big business right now, so it shouldn't come as much of a shock that Midway is set to bring *Shadow Hearts: Covenant* to Europe and the US in the Autumn. Set over a year after the original game ended (which was also released by Midway not so long ago), *Covenant* is more of an improvement rather than a radical change of direction – the lead character, Yuri, remains the same, as does the previous game's turn-based gameplay. However, with an all-new plot focused on Yuri being cursed by an evil cult, and enhancements to the visuals and the Judgement Ring combat system, it could still be worth a go for more inquisitive RPG fans.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '04

Metal Gear Acid

IT'S ALL IN THE CARDS

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Stealth Action
Players: 1



The fact that Konami has a *Metal Gear* title in the works for Sony's new handheld is hardly surprising. However, while we're impressed with how good it looks, we suspect many will be taken aback by the direction Konami has chosen to take. While Konami's official information is suitably nondescript (promising that it will 'redefine handheld gaming action'), the truth is that *Acid* appears to be an *X-Com*-style turn-based game rather than a traditional *Metal Gear* outing, with Snake having to make use of special 'cards' to improve his skills for a limited time and give him new weapons. It might not be what we expected (and we suspect it'll lead to disappointment in certain camps), but it certainly sounds like an interesting venture.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

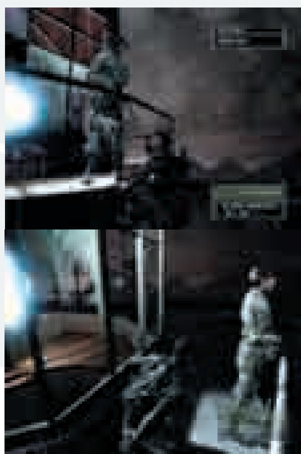
SHOWCASE CONT.

EVEN MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

Splinter Cell 3 [Working Title]

THERE'S ANOTHER ONE IN THE SHADOWS

Format: PC (Consoles TBA)
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Genre: Stealth Adventure
Players: 1-2 (Online TBA)



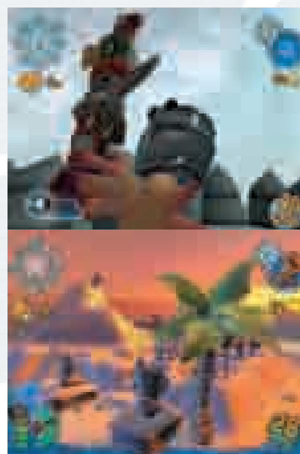
With *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* now sitting comfortably on the shelves, it seems only natural to hear that a third instalment of the series is already in development. Focusing on the dangers of information warfare and a potential threat to global stability originating in North Korea, it's your task once again as Sam Fisher to sneak through numerous operations and save the day. Although Ubisoft has already claimed that it will be "the best-looking game on any platform, period" (a brave boast, but not an impossible one), additions to Sam's array of moves and improvements in enemy AI are also on the cards, as well as the addition of co-op play through the main missions. Sounds like a good start to us…

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Worms: Forts Under Siege

GOING DEEPER UNDERGROUND

Format: PS2/Xbox/PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Team 17
Genre: Turn-Based Strategy
Players: 1-4



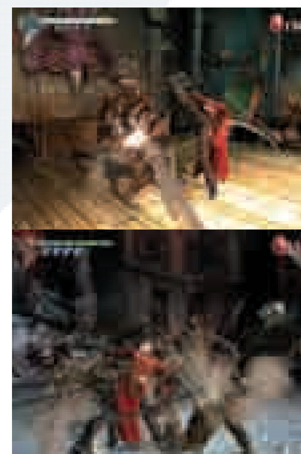
Despite the original *Worms* ranking as one of our all-time favourite multiplayer games, we're still of the belief that the move into 3D didn't do the franchise justice. That's why the news that Team 17 is now moving it in yet another direction fills us with both anticipation and anxiety. On the one hand, the switch to having fort-based combat where your *Worms* can erect defences and build weapons of mass destruction to take out your enemies sounds like a good idea. However, whether this will counteract the more uncontrollable aspects of the 3D gameplay seen in *Worms 3D* remains to be seen – if it doesn't, we suspect all faith in the series will be lost.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '04

Devil May Cry 3

GOING BACK TO DANTE'S ROOTS

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1



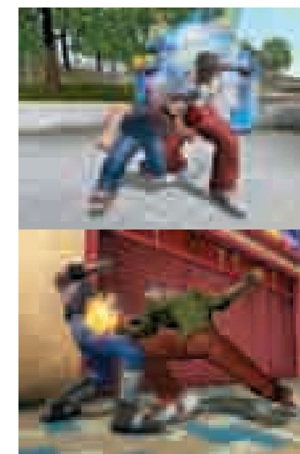
***Devil May Cry* may have set new standards for action adventure games the world over, but it's no secret that the sequel was a huge disappointment.** Thankfully, Capcom has learnt its lesson and is trying to make amends with the third game in the series, if only because it promises that *Devil May Cry 3* (which is actually a prequel in terms of the series' story timeline) will be more faithful to the original's gameplay while keeping the sequel's visual flair. However, the game will also use a new 'style' system that allows players to choose their method of fighting, be it short-range, long-range, defensive or evasive. As long as it doesn't end up being as tiresome as the second game, we can hardly wait.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Spikeout: Battle Street

AT LAST, SEGA SENDS FISTS FLYING

Format: Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Amusement Vision
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



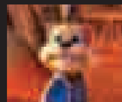
Seven years – that's how long we've been waiting for *Spikeout* to make an appearance on a home console. Having skipped a generation and completely missed the Dreamcast (which is where many expected it to land), SEGA is finally bringing its 3D *Streets Of Rage*-esque title to the Xbox. Thankfully, the long wait has meant that what we've now got is much improved over the arcade original. Now offering 16 playable characters and Xbox Live support, the free-roaming beat-'em-up style allows for both co-operative and competitive action that should, in theory, be great fun. Of course, it could also turn out to be just another brawler, but knowing Amusement Vision we can at least expect something rather interesting.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '05



Announced – SF: Anniversary Edition [Xb]

■ Capcom's celebration of its long-running beat-'em-up franchise continues on the Xbox, which beats its PS2 rival by not only including *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* in the package, but by having online play as well.



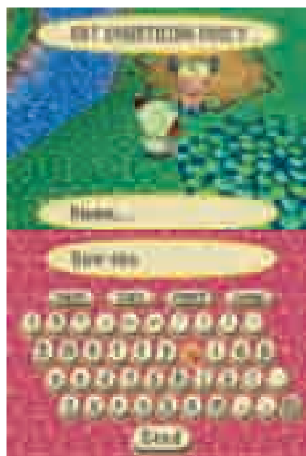
Reborn – Conker: Live And Reloaded [Xb]

■ Note the change in title – Rare's team-focused Live shooter appears to have had a considerable revamp in both the graphics and gameplay departments, although why it's not out until March '05 is anybody's guess.

Animal Crossing DS

IT'S THE GAME THAT NEVER SLEEPS

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Genre: Life Simulation
Players: 1



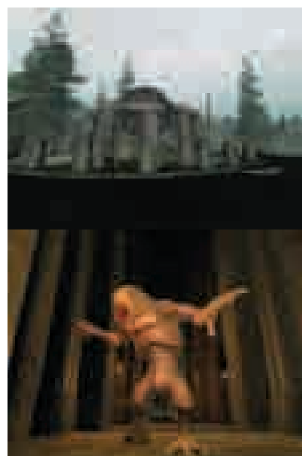
What could possibly be better than a game that allows you to live a new life in a village full of talking animals, completely in real time? Probably the same game, but in a portable form – that way, you'd never have to miss a single event in your town ever again. Basically, it's the GameCube game, only better. The action takes place on the top screen while the lower screen works as your inventory, a touch-screen keyboard for communicating, and even a drawing tool for designing your own logos for clothes, signs and other items. And the icing on the cake? It's all link-up, meaning you can visit other people's villages whenever you meet someone who's willing to share. We hate to admit it, but we're drooling already.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes

SO MANY PLAYERS, SO LITTLE TIME

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Sigil Games Online
Genre: MMORPG
Players: Massively Multiplayer



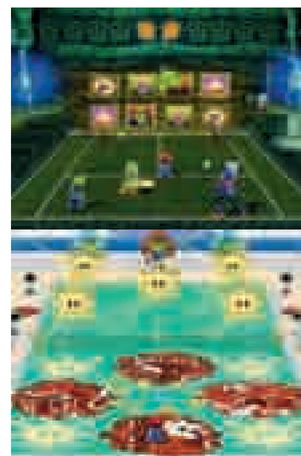
Massively multiplayer online role-playing games aren't exactly hard to come by these days, particularly ones based in the more traditional realms of fantasy. However, when one appears that has the original producer and co-creator of the *EverQuest* franchise, Brad McQuaid, at the helm, it pretty much forces you to sit up and take notice. Unfortunately, all the details that have been released about the game so far don't do much to help distinguish it from every other MMORPG (promising a world like no other, giving the player the freedom to develop their characters as they see fit, offering breathtaking landscapes and so on), so the proof of the pudding will definitely be in the eating when the beta test rolls round later this year.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

Mario Tennis

A SECOND SERVICE FOR MARIO

Format: GameCube
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Camelot
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



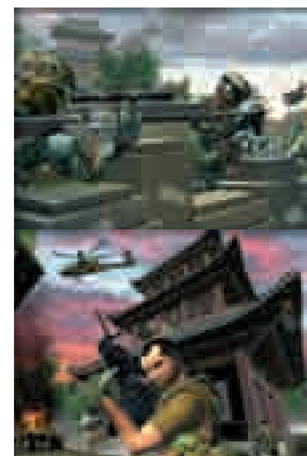
***Mario Golf* is finally out worldwide, so it's time for the plumber to move onto another sport that's been due for ages – tennis.** As you might expect, the actual concept behind *Mario Tennis* isn't much of an improvement over that of the original N64 version, with Mario and his friends getting together for a friendly knockabout across a variety of courts and mini-game-style challenges. However, the GameCube version makes changes in two major areas; the visuals (which, to be fair, look very nice indeed) and the range of locations, which now poach ideas from other GameCube titles such as *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Luigi's Mansion*. It's not out until 2005, though, so we've got some time to wait for it.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2

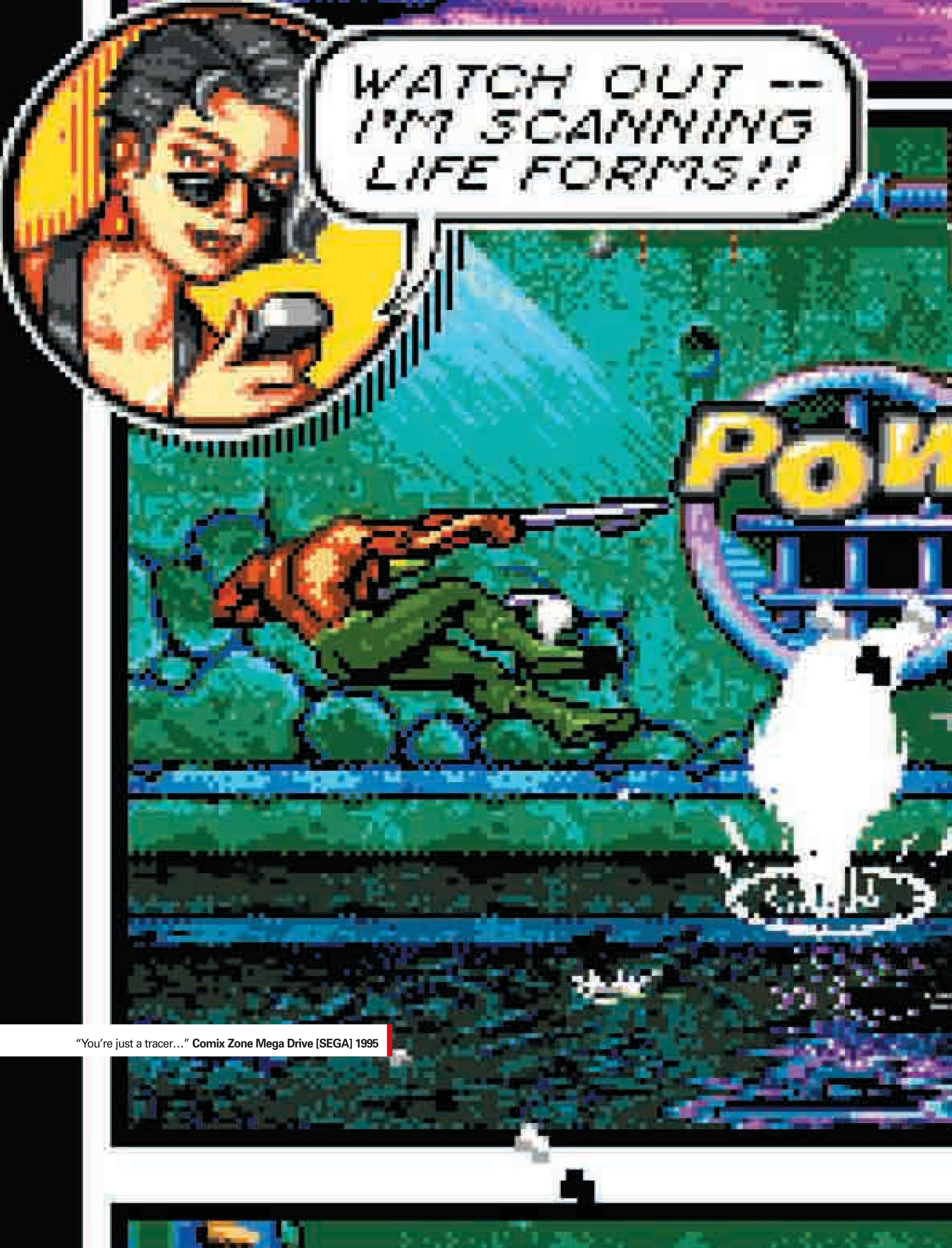
MOVING IN ON UBISOFT'S COMMAND

Format: Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: In-House
Genre: Squad Action
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



We like to think we're open to change, but when that change comes at the cost of tried-and-tested quality, we start to get a bit worried. That's the problem that *Ghost Recon 2* appears to be facing right now, thanks mostly to a shift from tactical and slower-paced squad-based action to a more arcade style of gameplay – something that will no doubt anger fans of the previous games. In truth, it feels like the game is trying to emulate SCi's *Conflict* series without much success – now incorporating scripted events, boss battles and the option to use a new third-person view, it's a far cry from the *Ghost Recon* of old. Right now, we're feeling rather disappointed; hopefully, Ubisoft will convince us that we're wrong.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '04



"You're just a tracer…" **Comix Zone Mega Drive [SEGA] 1995**


C'MON, GIMME A BREAK!!!

Store Wars

The Indies Strike Back



INDEPENDENT GAME STORES ARE BEING MUSCLED OUT OF THE MARKET, SO IS THERE REALLY A WAY FOR THEM TO SURVIVE?

The boy asking for *Harvest Moon* on the GameCube in the independent Game Empire store in Boscombe, Dorset, can't be older than about 12. The title he wants is a fairly niche one, yet it's an excellent game and, probably, a review-informed choice. That a young gamer has chosen to shop here rather than follow his friends down the high street is encouraging, but there's no denying that independent retailers are struggling to keep up in the growing games market. The relentless march of the chain store seems to swallow everything in sight, and now even supermarkets have got in on the act and are stocking consoles and software. With bundles and low prices, big stores seem to be ruling with an iron fist. It's a troubling time for indie retailers…

A few miles from Game Empire, the manager of the soon-to-be-defunct Interactive videogame shop in Bournemouth, who requested not to be named, knows what it's like to be muscled out of the market. "I've been losing money every week since Christmas," he says. "Two of the main roads have been shut off due to roadworks; they may as well put a moat round the area and not supply any boats. I've decided that I can't deal with it because three shops have opened in the same area, not just one."

An advocate of older platforms, Interactive's manager feels he can't



The IMPORTANCE of imports

The key to the survival of independent retailers may well be in importing. Indie shops such as Chipshop 2000 in Liverpool specialise in hard-to-get titles, retro games and import games and consoles. In 2000 there were import PS2s available for about £700, and the shop cleverly brought in extra customers by raffling off at least one machine. Even if the PS2 was out of reach to your average student, *Tekken Tag Tournament* and *Street Fighter EX 3* were available way before the official PAL releases. PAL machines can be modified to run NTSC titles and this reaps rewards for retailers because import titles are made available at inflated prices. For example, PSone title *Xenogears* sold for around £60 at ChipShop, but was worth it to hardcore gamers since it was unlikely to (and indeed didn't) get a PAL release.





Import titles such as *Xenogears* and *Street Fighter EX 3* can prove lucrative for indie retailers as high-street stores don't stock them.

compete in the market against nearby rivals. One of these is the new Game store, but also there's Game Exchange (one of a local chain) within a couple of miles, and the nearby Choices and Total Entertainment retail outlets, with their new and second-hand DVDs, videos, consoles and games. That's a fair bit of competition, and Interactive's manager is sceptical of other small retailers' claims that the presence of other stores will not affect sales. "I'll tell it like it is because I'm going, but anyone who's not going: do they actually want to stand there and say that Game is taking sales off them?" Perhaps he's correct in thinking this will undermine people's faith in independents, so no-one can really blame indies for keeping quiet about their hardships. But does this mean that we are seeing the last gasp of the proud tradition of independent game shops?

Perhaps it's important to understand the appeal of an independent games store. For many indie shoppers, it's simply the lure of sharing knowledge with minds marinated in gaming lore. "People shop where they want to shop – many large chains have incredibly knowledgeable staff, but many do not," says Stephen McGill, Microsoft's head of UK marketing for the Xbox. "Many customers value that gaming knowledge, but [it] depends on their tastes and engagement levels. However, indie retailers are definitely some of the most knowledgeable retailers around when it comes to games. It's their lifeblood and, typically, customers of independent retailers value that knowledge very highly indeed." But do the punters availing themselves of independents' services really think and buy differently? Game Empire manager Andy Clark says of the customers in his store that they look for "value for money, recommended titles and niche titles. *Forbidden Siren* is niche, for example," he says. "It's a great game but not everyone would want to buy it. Sales are great in Japan but over here are very limited. You've got a *Silent Hill* crowd over here that likes it, however."

This isn't to say, of course, that 'mainstream' titles aren't found in most independent stores, but they're often nestling next to more leftfield games. "If it's a bad title or a very niche title like *A-Train 6*, I'll get just one in," says Clark of the sort of stock he carries. "EA Big games or *Pro Evolution* are always going to sell, so I'll get ten of them." These games, assuming they sell, represent hundreds of pounds of revenue for the indie retailer. However, if we compare these stock figures to a local Game branch, *EA Rugby 2004* is sold at £19.99 and the chain's 50 per cent sale or return procedure allows bulk buying, hence 30 copies are on show. Surely this results in a downturn in turnover for Clark? "People know I'm cheaper than Game, so if I carry on the way I am there will be no difference to my business," he says. Clark prices new Game Boy Advance titles at £28.99 and older games



between £14.99 and £19.99. New GameCube, PS2 or Xbox titles weigh in between £34.99 and £37.99. This is actually around the same pricing as Game, but Game has the trump card of being able to sell on online, and to buy in bulk.

PERSISTENCE IS FUTILE

As Europe's leading videogame chain (it has 380 outlets in the UK alone, 25 of those opening in the last few months) Game has enormous bargaining power and a strong brand identity. But with an operation of this size, surely there's a danger of the personal touch being lost? Game spokesperson Lisa Artemis is sure that the chain caters for individual customers as comprehensively as an independent. "I think there are quite a few different gamers that come into our stores," she says. "Some know exactly what they want and make an immediate purchase. Others will need more advice, and with these customers at Game we try to find out how much time they want to spend on games, what consoles they have and what type of games they like, as well as their budget."

Clark is optimistic about the whole issue, but he admits it is hard work for the independent, and it's clear that competitive pricing is not always beneficial for the consumer. "It's like Argos – they do any PS2 game for £29.99 but when you go in they've never got any in there," he says. "They just say that to draw you in – I've had customers coming in saying that." Argos, however, arguably kept the GameCube afloat in the UK last year by slashing the price of the machine to £79.99 well before the official announcement. The machine flew off the shelves, even if the exercise was merely a way of getting rid of excess stock. An unexpected saviour….

But despite the entrance of 'non-gaming' game shops into the market, many of them don't see themselves as a threat to videogame retailers. Sainsbury's, for instance, sells software and consoles but, explains a spokesperson, "percentage wise, of total supermarket sales, games represent about 0.1 per cent. We don't cater for special gamers. They just grab it and that's it." He suggests that Sainsbury's is not specialised enough to compete with independent stores, but could pose a threat to larger high-street chains. However, he doesn't see Sainsbury's putting a greater emphasis on game sales in the foreseeable future, indicating that there may still be a reluctance among gamers to make picking up software as mundane as buying a bag of potatoes.



"THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A PLACE FOR KNOWLEDGEABLE AND PASSIONATE RETAILERS, LARGE AND SMALL – EACH OFFER CUSTOMERS DIFFERENT THINGS"



Small indie chains like Game Exchange happily stock more mainstream current games with older second-hand titles.

Money Talks

For all the independent retailers' fighting talk, there's no denying that this is a tough time for small businesses in a rapidly expanding market. New Age Consoles – a chain of five stores – recently went under, and there are smaller operations, such as Interactive in Bournemouth, that are having to shut up shop.

Because of the very nature of independent stores, it can be hard to monitor how many there are and how well they are doing. One way of doing this would be for stores to submit their sales figures to Chart Track, the body that compiles charts for music, video and software sales in the UK and Ireland.

"The independent sector is the weakest part of the Chart Track UK retail panel," says Chart Track's Rick Smith. The organisation has offered free data capture terminals to indies in the past, but Smith says the uptake was "very poor". "The indie sector is an important part of the UK market," he says. "It is time it started supporting the industry chart and had its sales accurately reflected."

So do the small stores need to start acting more like the big stores if they're to prove their worth? Well, it's clear that industry figures already appreciate the value of indie stores, and those gamers that regularly use independents will no doubt continue to do so. Also, as many indie shops rely on sales of second-hand or imported titles, many of their sales would not be recorded. In order to have an impact on the UK charts, indies would have to start pushing the mass-market franchises that are available in every other store. Is that what we want?

It is the indie's independence that makes them so appealing, which is perhaps why many don't join the chart wars.







Some indies are weathering the market, but 'closing down' signs are worryingly common in smaller stores.

As an indication of how competitive the market has become in recent years, consider the fact that three 128-bit consoles from different manufacturers are currently duking it out and *surviving*. More consoles means more games and hence more retailers – the industry is more lucrative and cut-throat than ever. Steven Crawford, a trainee manager at Game Exchange, a small chain of half a dozen shops across the south of England, thinks that there's a place in the market for all sorts of retailers. "Game makes it hard on some shops, but there's one close to all our shops and it doesn't seem to have a negative effect, especially on retrogaming," he says. "By checking the prices of other retailers you can compete directly, apart from the bulk purchasing power. Listening to the customers can tell you of the competition, and it helps having a wider product knowledge base about cutting-edge stuff."

Indeed, Crawford sees videogame piracy as far more threatening than the omnipresent Game, and is adamant that indies and chains can coexist. But what about the sphere of online gaming, where many large stores have been able to steal a march over smaller chains or independent stores? Prices are often much lower on the web, but Crawford believes it will never replace the face-to-face experience of buying a game. "You can preorder, but there are trust issues with money that don't sit too well with some," he says. "You'll still have people coming in asking for hints and tips about games."

Game's Artemis is in no doubt that for larger stores, e-commerce is a huge boon. "Online retailing is a great tool for an existing high-street retailer such as Game," she says. "It means that we can provide another avenue for customers if they can't make it to a store for whatever reason." Interactive's manager is sceptical of selling online, saying "*Project Gotham 2* has a £32.49 trade price but retails online for £29.99, so there's no profit in online selling for small indies – we pay more for each game." But Game Empire's Andy Clark has decided to go online in order to drum up more custom. "We'll have more interest because people go on the internet all the time – it can only be a good thing," he says.

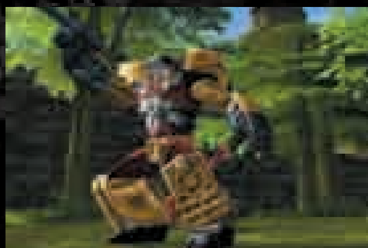
Nevertheless, it's clear that jumping on the online bandwagon is not going to save the indie store in the long run – it needs to think of new ways of invading the mass consciousness. It is apparent that e-commerce currently costs independents too much in terms of buying stock, the profit margin is low, and the looming spectre of eBay drives online prices down for recent game releases and retro titles. Could it be that the survival of the independent will stem from a tremendous enthusiasm for great games and the promise of interaction with like-minded souls?

Artemis freely admits that independent retailers occupy a unique and important role in the market, saying: "Independents play a vital role within the games industry, holding a vast amount of retro stock as well as new games – and consumers love that they can still buy these games in some retailers today." Although Artemis

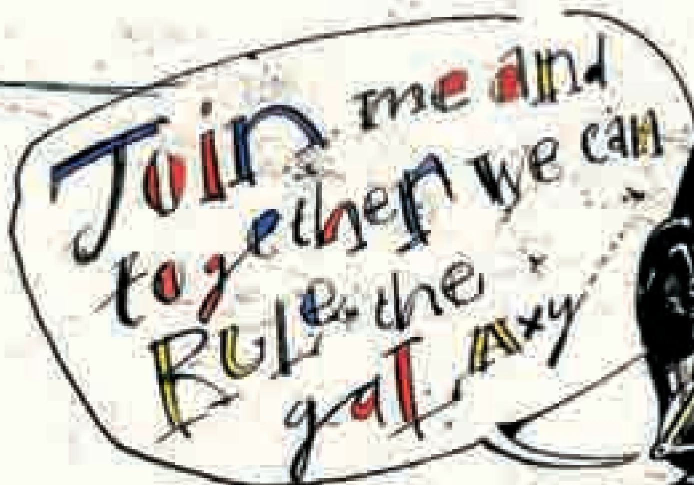
Shop. til The price drops

So when it comes down to value for money, can the indies compete with the high-street chains and internet retailers?

1. *Transformers* (PS2) – Game: £32.99, Play.com: £29.99, Tesco: £33.24, Video Game Centre: £34.99
2. *TOCA Race Driver 2* (Xbox) – Game: £32.99, Play.com: £32.99, Tesco: £33.24, Video Game Centre: £39.99
3. *Wario Ware Inc: Mega Party Game$* (Cube import) – Game, Play.com, Tesco: all n/a, Video Games Centre: £54.99
4. *Unreal Tournament* (PC) – Game: £29.99, Play.com: £24.99, Tesco: £33.24, Video Games Centre: n/a (don't stock PC games)



To buy three items with Game costs £95.97, 87.97 (inc. p+p) with Play.com, £99.72 at Tesco and £129.97 at the Video Game Centre (including one import title). The truth is that new releases across all console platforms will still set you back nearly £40 in most high-street retailers, although they are a few pounds cheaper online. E-commerce doesn't incur the overheads of renting high-street stores, hence its lower prices, and supermarkets can recoup any losses made by selling games by profiting on other items sold in the store. While many independents try to match other stores' low prices for new releases, it can be hard to go too low before making a loss. Where the indies come into their own are for pre-PSone titles that may not be available in high-street stores, and imported titles that have limited appeal. The price of *Wario Ware* pushed Video Games Centre's total through the roof, but it's often the case that people are prepared to pay for rare and hard-to-find titles.



couldn't comment on the effect on independents of Game's bulk buying and discounting, perpetual sales promotions, and regular and profitable throughflow of second-hand titles, it's clear that the chain is in an enviable position in UK game retailing. "Because Game is the largest specialist retailer," says Artemis, "we can cater for all customers' tastes, from mums who buy presents, to 20-something professionals who love dance mats and James Bond, to over-50s addicted to flying sims." Is there hope for the independent in the face of this all-encompassing ethos?

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

What's glaringly obvious is that Game has had the pick of the high street sites over the past ten years, often with two stores at opposing ends of a precinct. By their very nature, independent stores can only be in one place at once, but Game Empire's Andy Clark remains positive. "It's like supermarkets," he says. "Asda will always be around, but loads of independent shops pop up and within a year or two they're gone. It's hard work, but we will always have independents." McGill, like Clark, believes that indies and chains can continue to coexist happily. "There will always be a place for knowledgeable and passionate retailers, large and small – each offer different customers different things," he says. "Indies are key for a segment of our market today and we don't expect to see that change. Ultimately, people will shop where they want to shop – where they feel most comfortable, where they get the level of service they desire and where they get the products they want."

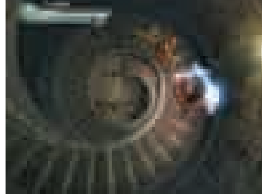
Interactive's manager, however, is still concerned about the perceived lack of gaming nous in chain stores. "I had a bloke in here who bought a GameCube off me. A week later he went and bought a game from Game and he had to take it back three times because it was in Dutch only. They pulled all these games off the shelves, omitting to tell him that perhaps his console had been switched over from English to Dutch. He had to come in here and I had to help him." His observation that many people seem to buy their games in high-street stores and use his store (and other indies) merely as an "information centre" is disheartening – shops can't stay in business on goodwill, they need revenue too. Yet it highlights the vital role of independent stores as places where expert gaming knowledge can be exchanged with like-minded enthusiasts, without the

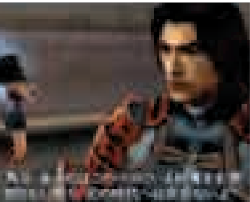
"INDEPENDENTS PLAY A VITAL ROLE WITHIN THE GAMES INDUSTRY, HOLDING A VAST AMOUNT OF RETRO STOCK AS WELL AS NEW GAMES – CONSUMERS LOVE THAT"

As long as gamers vote with their feet (and their wallets) and visit their local stores, there should be a future for the indies. Of course, there is a more drastic solution… Look at *Doom* – one of the most successful games ever. It was shareware and cut out the chain-store middleman completely; a high-quality, genre-defining game that showed a new way forward for commercial distribution. If independent retailers got involved with the distribution of tasters for affordable full games, there's a future for indie stores and fresh IP. It could be enterprises like this that will preserve the status of the indie retailer as the haunt of die-hard gamers but also attract inquisitive players away from the high street.

Illustration by Graeme Bandeira

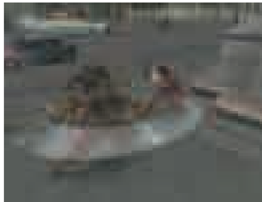
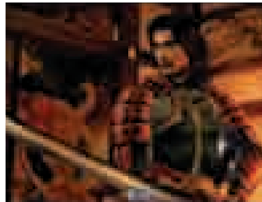


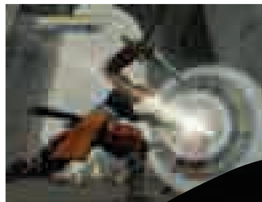



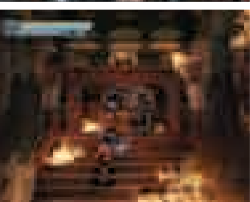
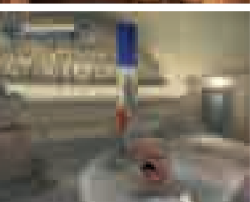
Sacre bleu! Samanosuke has fallen through time to 21st Century Paris. But it will take more than a few gendarmes to defeat the rampaging forces of Nobunaga Oda…

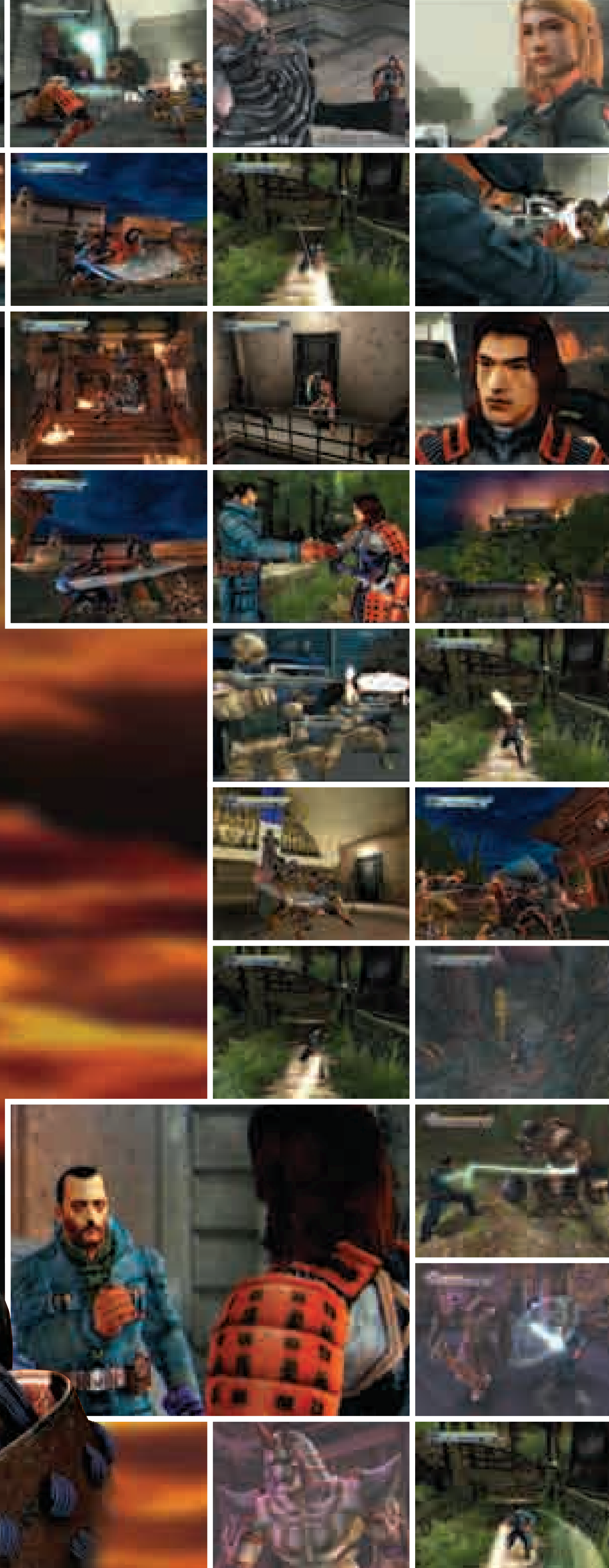
Onimusha 3 102





REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



Jacques is nifty with a sword, but Genma can be dispatched with modern weapons too, luckily.





ONIMUSHA 3

CAPCOM'S FINALE IS IN HIGH (SAMURAI) SPIRITS



Character models have been spruced up significantly – look at her pixels, phwoar etc…



Got *Blade Warriors*? Then you'll be able to unlock this highly inappropriate panda suit.

DETAILS





FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
9 July

PLAYERS
1

Honnoji Temple. Legendary samurai Hidemitsu Samanosuke Okechi cuts through the Genma hordes, an appointment with the demonic Nobunaga Oda to keep. Rather unexpectedly, however, a time rift sucks Samanosuke away from his impending duel to current-day Paris, where Jacques Blanc is enjoying a showdown with some Genma of his own… If this really is the last *Onimusha* title, it looks like the series wants to bow out in style. Lavish graphics, samurai action and a time-travelling story are the order of the day, but are they enough for a decent send off?

Series faithful should feel at home with *Onimusha 3*'s streamlined fighting, which is more *Devil May Cry* than *Resident Evil* – the emphasis is on slicing and dicing, with a limited yet complementary set of moves for each character. However, absorbing Genma Souls still provides the twists, enabling health regeneration, the powering up of weapons, restoration of health and the ability to turn into an 'Oni' form – a supernaturally-charged persona that's particularly welcome upon boss battles. *Onimusha 3* also recalls the structure of its forebears by mixing combat with puzzles. Though these start off fairly simple, later levels require items to be transported through time – something that adds scope to the usual recipe while keeping things logical. Facilitating this time-travelling item swapping is Ako – a fairy-like

ENHANCED

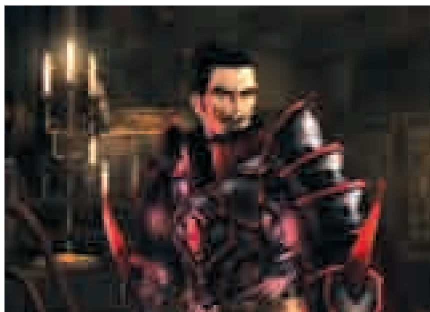
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

BUMPY: The proper use of 3D backdrops allows for more adventurous gameplay and some nifty moves.

OLD-SCHOOL: Controls are solid, but the *Resident Evil* style is mapped to the digital pad for retro-heads.

GOING UNDERGROUND

There are scant reasons in life to celebrate mindless repetition, yet dotted sparingly around *Onimusha*'s environments are gateways to the Demon Realm, the gatekeeper of which is a trussed-up demon hanging upside down from a bungie cord. As always, entering the Demon Realm and enduring wave after wave of enemies rewards you with something nice. Health items are rife here, so it's good to find a welcoming portal just before your final confrontation with Nobunaga, just in case you haven't levelled up sufficiently. It's a crude operation in difficulty balancing, but it's still effective.





Backgrounds are astonishingly detailed, wherever you go in the game.



"Funny," mused Jacques, "this doesn't look like Gare du Nord…"



companion whose tunic can be imbued with runes, providing more effective Soul management and a helpful, if time-consuming, healing ability.

The gameplay isn't the only thing to get a face-lift, as *Onimusha 3* now also uses fully-fledged 3D backdrops. Not only does this allow for striking direction at times – witness the Arc De Triomphe towering overhead, or the hazy view of the streets below from the Eiffel Tower – but it allows new character Jacques to go all *Rygar* on us, rappelling around environments with ease. This increases the sense of exploration and allows for puzzles of greater scope, making a welcome diversion from Samanosuke's strictly ground-based skill set.

Considering the sumptuous backgrounds, be it a cathedral interior, lush garden or Japanese dwelling caked in snow, it's nice to see that the character models are particularly detailed, while all manner of lighting effects play their role too; the flames engulfing Honnoji Temple in the opening scene are so convincing you could toast muffins with your TV. The engine is evidently very flexible too, with a later level resembling a scenario from Koei's *Dynasty Warriors*, flooding the environment with foes. Sadly, there are niggles in the presentation. While sound effects are perfectly executed – fire crackles and metal clashes metal with a satisfying zing – the voice acting has a tendency to grate. Not that it's bad, it's just that Jean Reno is only used when Jacques speaks French, his American drawl seemingly voiced by the butchest actor available. There are also a few synching issues, the flurry of extraneous lip movements evoking memories of badly dubbed kung fu movies.

While the mix of Gallic and Japanese levels is nigh-on perfect and the plot creates plenty of intrigue, the threads unravel slightly as the game reaches its climax, with players having to run a rusty old gauntlet of previously dusted bosses in quick succession. Furthermore, duelling up the Eiffel Tower is hard enough, but to be sent back to the beginning if caught in a time pocket is simply vindictive game design. The climax is also negated by effectively having to engage Nobunaga twice – once as Jacques, once as Samanosuke. While the penultimate battle is a tense and well-orchestrated clash, the final showdown is a clichéd letdown.

That said, this is really one of the only low points in what is otherwise a relatively satisfying conclusion to the saga. Of course, that *Onimusha 3* is the final chapter is a shame, given its stellar mix of action and puzzles. Combine this with a new control system and it's clear that the series is only just hitting its stride. Go on, Capcom – one more wouldn't hurt, would it?

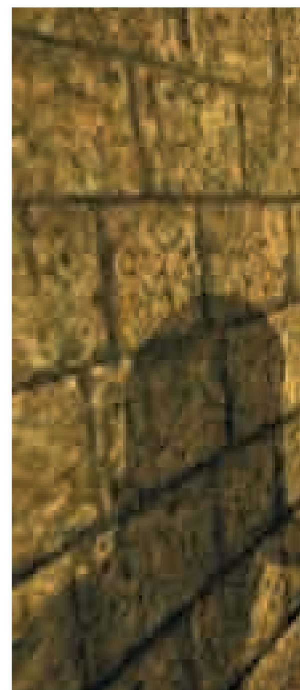
FAQs

Q. GOOD CONVERSION?
There's a 60hz mode, and while it's criminal that Jean Reno only provides his French lines, the rest isn't too wince-inducing.

Q. NICE CG?
The intro by Robot is an astounding example of what can be done with CG, and Samanosuke looks uncannily like real-life counterpart Takeshi Kaneshiro.

Q. WEAPON OF CHOICE?
Bizarrely, the weapons Samanosuke uses in the opening level are different to those you'll collect in the game, so don't get too attached.

VERDICT 7/10
THOROUGHLY ABSORBING, IF NOT QUITE A TRUE CLASSIC


If you're going to off someone, best do it cleanly and quietly so no-one notices…

I'VE BEEN WATCHING, I'VE BEEN WAITING, IN THE SHADOOOOOWS

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Ion Storm

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

It may be a continuation of a well-respected PC series, but Ion Storm's latest game rarely seems out of place on the Xbox. This may be largely because it uses the developer's *Invisible War* engine to excellent effect, though the fact that it is in many ways as successful as (and in other areas surpasses) the *Deus Ex* sequel may be lost on anyone who didn't play the futuristic title. Regardless, *Deadly Shadows* strikes an intriguing balance between gameplay and form that, considering its pseudo-medieval setting, makes it seem almost the wizened grandfather to the *Deus Ex* family.

In terms of structure, there is little to separate *Deadly Shadows* and *Invisible War*: the game is set in a fully realised city and missions must be perilously journeyed to rather than merely selected; the protagonist is an augmented social pariah; the narrative deals with prophecies, a secret society and the role of the hero in a plan of great significance. The scope of the two titles is similarly overwhelming, and anyone who has trouble remembering localised gaming geography will get lost very quickly – especially since your position isn't marked on the hand-drawn, two-dimensional, 'ye olde' pocket map of each large, dark level.

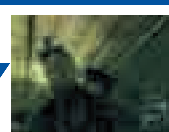
And boy, are these levels dark. Lead character Garrett slides effortlessly from the shadows in order to pick a lock (or pocket) before silently dropping back out of sight. It's an effect you simply never tire of, and it's why it never feels stupid to be hiding three inches away from a patrolling guard without being seen (as is so often the case in *Splinter Cell*). Of course, the gloom sometimes makes it hard to find your way out of a simple tunnel or alley corner, and it's here where Garrett's mechanical cat's eye comes into play, offering a sepia-tinged, illuminated, first-person view. It's a shame that you can't use it and move at the same time, though the horrid strobing sound that accompanies the effect would be enough to ensure it wasn't overused anyway.

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN

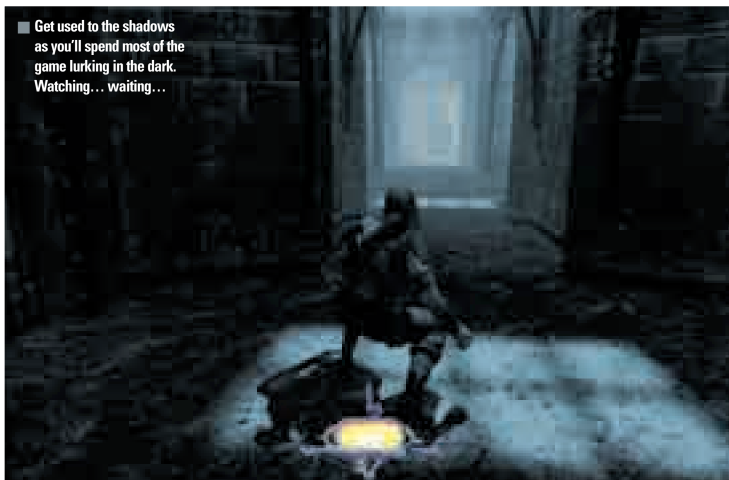


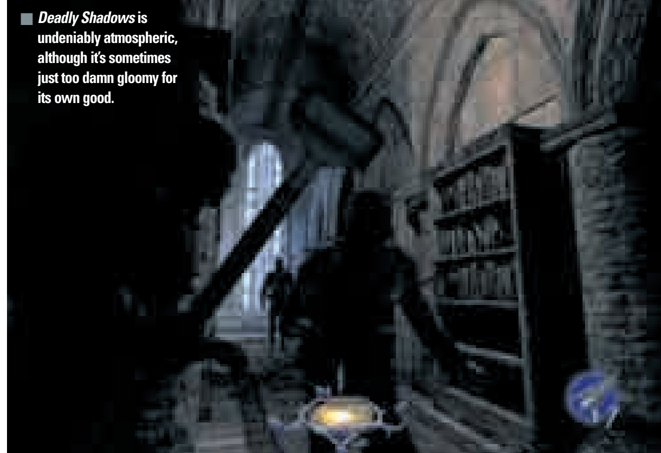
BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW


Get used to the shadows as you'll spend most of the game lurking in the dark. Watching… waiting…


Deadly Shadows is undeniably atmospheric, although it's sometimes just too damn gloomy for its own good.

QUIVER IN THE DARK

Deadly Shadows' combat mechanic is ingenious, particularly the Bow which comes with various arrows to nock. As well as standard pointy arrows, you also have Noisemakers (to create a diversion), Water Arrows (to put out torches or wash away bloodstains) and Moss Arrows (to muffle a loud floor). Using the same weapon for both stealth and attack is a masterstroke here, as it highlights just how mutually exclusive the two methods of play are. If a murder has to be committed, then Garrett is best off employing his Blackjack for a clean, quick, _Hitman_-style sneak kill. Later, _Deadly Shadows_ rewards the cunning thief with Climbing Gloves (with which to get up onto the rooftops) and the not-at-all-stealthy Explosive Mines.





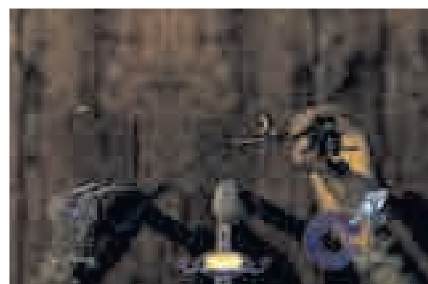


FAQs

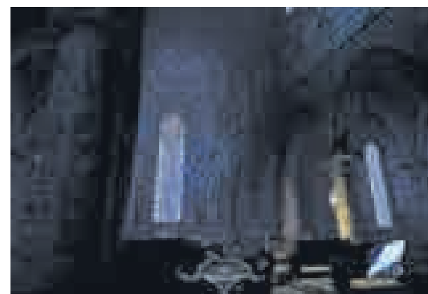
Q. FIRELIGHT?
There are a few gas (read: unbreakable) sources, but the environments are surprisingly 'controllable' and can be shrouded in darkness at will.

Q. A BIT DULL?
Absolutely not. If anything, the primitive nature of the setting serves to heighten the palpable sense of threat all around.

Q. A FAITHFUL REPRESENTATION OF THE PERIOD?
If you discount the sub-race of monsters and the magic-staffed wizards, then it's like sitting through a documentary.



Lock picking is apparently a staple activity for larcenous medieval types, so keep a steady hand at all times.



FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FADE IN/OUT: The genre's getting crowded, but what other game has plague-era stealth by firelight?

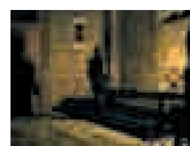
HAVE IT ALL: *Deadly Shadows* combines level-based play with a massive hub-world adventure.

Another stealth-related factor working in the game's favour is the strength of its AI routines. Most stealth games make their guards psychic to heighten tension: a badnik will search for you for however long it takes, but always stop six inches from your final hiding place to add an extra level of 'will he see me?' artifice. Not so here. Guards run straight past you and twice round the block, or even change their patrols altogether, before settling imperceptibly back into their original routine. Admittedly, a great deal of the tension created is again due to the shortcomings of the rudimentary map system, but it's a twisted pleasure to see a guard bump into a civilian in the shadows and, mistakenly believing them to be you, slay them.

Even after only playing it briefly, you'll see it's clear that *Deadly Shadows* is a game you 'feel' rather than learn (and one with innumerable paths to completion) and that Ion Storm does not encourage playing for five minutes before reloading the previous save point. Being slain in the street by a guard isn't so much a case of 'game over' as it is 'go directly to jail' (and then escape), at which point you not only have to find your way out but re-collect your weapons in the process. In fact, the degree that the developer has stretched the level-by-level game mechanic across the open-ended hub-world adventure is impressive, though it can sometimes be almost too daunting when you've lost track of direction or, worse still, reloaded after saving in an unrecognisable locale.

Of course, all light carries the threat of darkness, and *Deadly Shadows* contains a few grating anachronisms. The first – the game's method of highlighting an object or door – is obviously out of place, the highlighted feature shining neon blue as though it has lost its texture bitmap. Additionally, the dialogue – though generally well written – is voiced with American accents, which don't sit naturally with lines like 'Do mine eyes deceive me?'. However, these are merely small gripes. In an era where stealth is synonymous with carrying a full arsenal, *Deadly Shadows* is the purer alternative to the gung-ho hidey-seek genre.

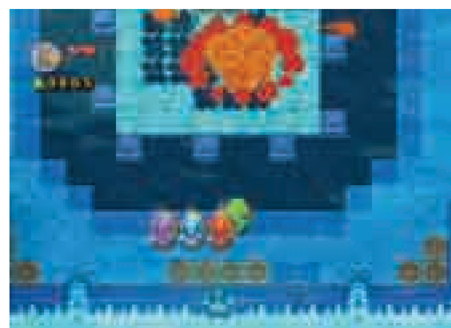
PC £29.99 23 APRIL

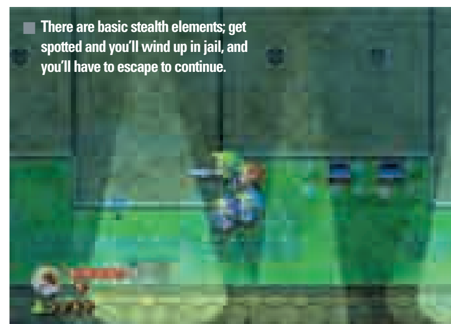


The PC version enhances on the Xbox's visual quality, particularly if you've got the latest graphics cards. The style of gameplay should be familiar to PC fans too.

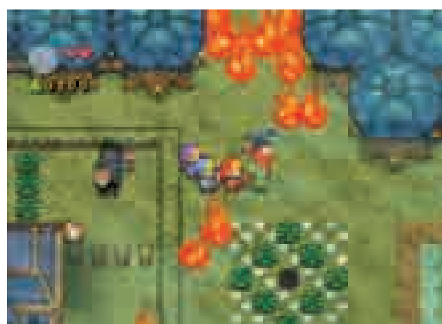
VERDICT 8/10
A GEM, DESPITE STRANGE DEVELOPMENT CHOICES

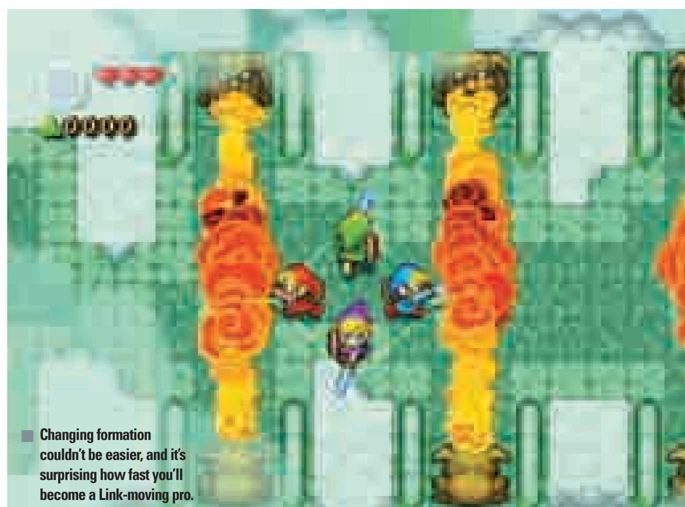

You'll often have to warp between dimensions to clear all the enemies out of an area.



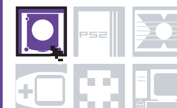

There are basic stealth elements; get spotted and you'll wind up in jail, and you'll have to escape to continue.

LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR


Despite retaining the visual style of *Link To The Past*, there are plenty of *Wind Waker*-esque visual touches that make things look really lovely.


Changing formation couldn't be easier, and it's surprising how fast you'll become a Link-moving pro.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

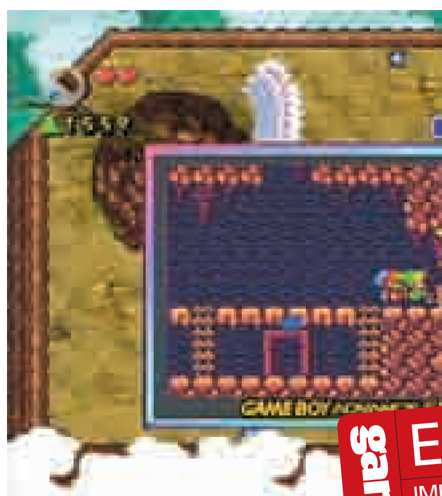
PUBLISHER
Nintendo

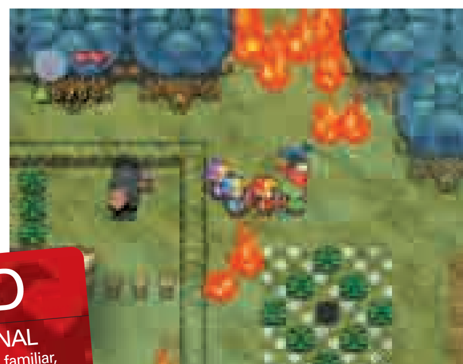
DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4





games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

POLISHED: The SNES-style visuals feel familiar, but use new touches to look better than before.

BIG IS BEST: The GBA game only had four stages, so having 24 here makes it feel like a real adventure.

Champions of fair play and moral virtue, take heed: Nintendo's latest creation could very well corrupt the way you play games. In a world where co-operative gameplay means just that – watching your teammates' backs, sharing collectables and generally being 'nice' – it's rare that you find a game that not only allows you to perform callous acts on your companions, but actively encourages you to do so. *Four Swords Adventures* is that game; one that sees you lending a helping hand one minute, then setting fire to your friend's clothing before tossing him down a hole the next – and oh, how sweet it is.

Calling forth all that is usually considered taboo in the realm of co-operative games, Link's latest adventure – a rather obvious evolution of the small but perfectly formed game included on the GBA version of *Link To The Past* – is a lesson to all in how well Nintendo's vision of connectivity can be realised with a little care and attention. Of course, the expense of having to use four GBAs, each with their own link cable, can't be avoided if you want to experience the game as it was intended; however, doing so gives you access to a world that proves that connectivity is more than just a gimmick – done properly, it can offer a wealth of new gameplay experiences.

This isn't to say that *Four Swords* is a solely multiplayer game. Indeed, whether you've got enough friends to control a Link each, or find yourself taking charge of all four yourself, the game adapts to offer a unique experience. Alone, you have a troop of Links that is easily ordered about with the press of a button, while spare Links are split between players if you can't muster a full complement of four during multiplayer games. What's more, the game's level-based structure (as opposed to the continuous adventures associated with the *Zelda* series) means that friends can drop in and out of the action without feeling like they've fallen behind. In this way, you can overcome every obstacle and task whether it takes one, two or even all four Links, from pushing switches and killing enemies to tackling the more devious puzzles.

And believe us, they are devious. Sometimes requiring more thought than we seem to remember other *Zelda* games demanding of us, the clever use of colour (representative of each Link), attention to detail and the fact that the action switches to the GBA screen (appearing as a window on screen if alone with a pad) when exploring interior areas means you'll often find yourself scratching your head while you untangle puzzle mechanics rarely seen before. Co-operation between Links is often the key, no matter how many people you're playing with, although organising four Links onto their own individual switches and then sharing the rewards with friends isn't quite as clear-cut as you might think.

Which brings us back nicely to our opening guarantee; played properly in multiplayer, *Four Swords* is the very antithesis of co-operation. Far from being the charming collaborative romp that you'd expect from a company that prides itself on making games with moral standards, the game regularly tempts you with all kinds of means to screw your companions over, with the only restriction being how creative you are with your fiendish tactics. And yes, it really is all about the money. Actual progress may rely on fragile truces, but it's every man for himself as far as Rupees are concerned, particularly as whoever has the most at the end of the level (after some decisive voting that can deny even the richest player) is branded the winner. As such, uncovered fountains or sudden showers of Rupees can create merry hell unlike anything we've seen before, while seeing three players deliberately kill the current leader (relieving him of half his stash in the process) is par for the course, rather than being a slappable offence.

Strange, then, that with such devious gameplay enhancing what is already a sprawling and challenging adventure, one of the game's only disappointments comes in the form of Shadow Battle: a cut-down arena-based mode that shuns the adventuring side of things for non-stop Rupee grabbing. It's not that it isn't fun, but it just doesn't prove as satisfying as you might think – strange, considering the opposite is true in the main game. However, bar this and the removal of *Tetra's Trackers* from the Western versions of the game (which, having played the Japanese equivalent, is just plain criminal), *Four Swords Adventures* is a masterpiece that once again proves the cynics wrong and Nintendo right. Shame no-one other than its own first-party developers can do the same…

SWORDS ADVENTURES

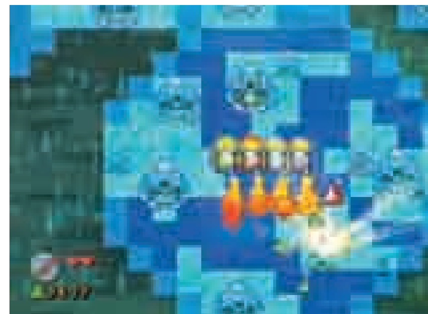
NINTENDO WANTS SOMETHING DONE PROPERLY, SO IT'S DONE IT ITSELF

VERDICT 8/10

MULTIPLAYER GENIUS, BUT GREAT FOR LONE GAMERS TOO

FOUR-MATION

It might sound tricky at first, but controlling a group of Links when playing alone couldn't be easier. For the most part you'll be in charge of a single Link (usually green) with the other three tailing behind. When the situation calls for it, though, you can easily switch between four different formations, or even split your men up with a touch of the Select or X button. If you can master all that, the rest should be simple…





FAQs

Q. ONLY MULTIPLAYER?
Definitely not. Obviously, the game is a different beast when playing with friends, but there's still plenty here to keep lone gamers entertained for a long while.

Q. GBA CONTROLS ONLY?
In multiplayer, yes – however, if you're playing alone you can get along just fine with a GameCube pad.

Q. ANYTHING MISSING?
While we understand Nintendo's reason for dropping *Tetra's Trackers*, it does leave a hole for those in the know – it was a great game in its own right.

NOT SO MUCH DANCE, DANCE REVOLUTION AS DANCE, DANCE EVOLUTION

SPACE CHANNEL 5 – PART 2



Locations have gone from 'slightly over the top' to 'off the scale' as this Vegas-style stage clearly shows.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
UGA

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
TBC (Other PAL Territories: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

We're sure we're not the only ones, but the number of games that come out on today's supposedly next-gen consoles that could easily have been done on the Dreamcast baffles us. A few ports early on in the PS2's life were just about excusable, bringing relative unknowns like *Headhunter* and *Rez* into the busiest market going, and it's this category into which *Space Channel 5 – Part 2* falls. Released only in Japan on the Dreamcast, this will be the first chance for English-speaking gamers to get their hands on a fully native version and see just how bizarre it is even after translation.

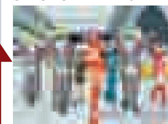
Showcasing better choreography than 99 per cent of MTV's annual output and making the player feel better than even a heart-warming tale about a talking pig ever could, this is one of the few examples of real SEGA magic this generation. The classic 'Simon Says' gameplay has been only slightly tweaked to incorporate holding buttons and lyrical and instrumental battles, but rather than ruin the simplicity this combines with the more eclectic mix of tunes and settings to really help give the game a better feeling of progression and variety.

By the time you reach this paragraph, we'll probably have completed *Space Channel 5 – Part 2*. Not for the first time either – we've lost count of how many times we've saved the world through the medium of dance, but the fact that we keep coming back for more is indicative of the game's quality. Every now and then you'll just get the urge to return to a certain favourite area (our soft spot is for Ulala's duelling guitars showdown with Pudding – words really can't do it justice) or try to beat Ulala's Dance mode one more time; what the game lacks in substance, it more than makes up for in replayability and branching.

SEGA has dangled *Space Channel 5 – Part 2* over our balcony by making it available in virtually every PAL territory except the UK, but with no marketing it had all the impact of a straight-to-video film sequel. Expect to see it fall onto shelves unheralded at any time, but if you don't happen upon it in the next few months, get online and grab a bargain.

VERDICT 7/10
TWEAKED, REFINED AND FUNKY AS EVER

SPACE CHANNEL 5



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



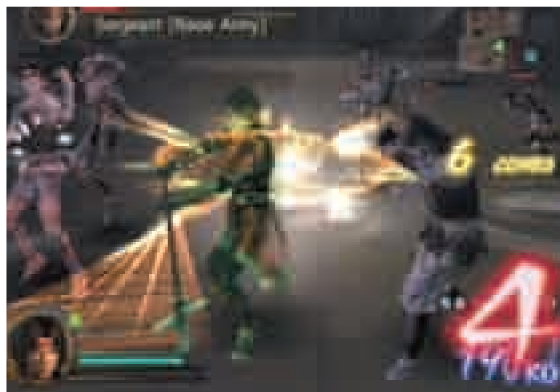
UM JAMMER LAMMY

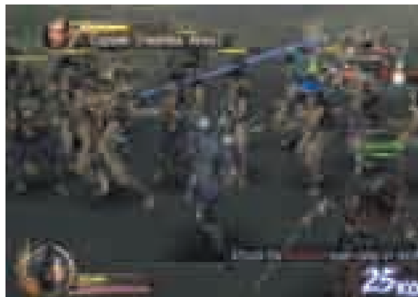
games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
ROCK IT: Instruments can be played by pressing any direction on the D-pad.
DRESS-UP: Feats of rhythmic brilliance are rewarded with new costumes and characters.





Space Michael returns once more, even lending his *Thriller* dance to Ulala and pals. Sadly, Space Michael's private fairground, oxygen chamber and personal zoo don't appear. Or at least, not that we've seen…


As in *Dynasty Warriors*, powerful Musou attacks can be unleashed when your gauge is full.

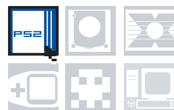

The number of enemies on screen at once is nothing short of awesome.


The most devastating pose in all the land? It's no Blue Steel…

SAMURAI WARRIORS

SLASH, SLASH, KILL, SLASH, KILL, JUMP, SLASH, KILL, KILL…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
Koei

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Two steps forward, two steps back. *Samurai Warriors* can be succinctly summed up with just these six words, as anyone familiar with Koei's long-running *Dynasty Warriors* series will immediately notice a slew of alterations that work both for and against this latest title. For a start, playable characters take a major hit in terms of sheer numbers but more than make up for it with a new system of development that allows for more moves and skills to be earned as well as simply powering up their attacks. Best of all are the new styles of gameplay that have been added to stop every level being simply two armies meeting, greeting and beating one another in the middle of a large plain. The addition of interior areas full of traps and enemies, and epic battles where more than two armies collide, may not sound like much but their inclusion really does help to keep the progression feeling fresher than in the *Dynasty Warriors* games.

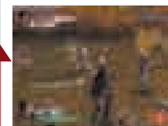
To call *Samurai Warrior*s one of the brownest games ever made would be no word of a lie – the lack of colour is arguably the game's weakest area and this, coupled with the repetitive nature of this style of game, can just make it feel that much more tedious at times. And it's this that really prevents the game from improving greatly upon its predecessors. This is a real shame, since with a little bit more attention paid to colour and variety, this could have been something special in its field. Still, if Koei knows one thing it's consistency and there can be no complaints that this lets down its heritage.

If you never had a place in your heart for running through expansive areas and laying waste to entire armies by yourself, *Samurai Warriors* is unlikely to ever find its way into your PS2. For anyone else, though, Koei's latest mass-slaughter sim is one of the best games of its ilk, despite a few long-standing flaws that the developer seems reluctant to address (such as the simplicity of the combat system – when you're killing hundreds of people at a time, a larger repertoire of attacks would keep the action from growing stale so quickly, if at all). The sheer amount of unlockables, the unparalleled scale of the carnage and a mysterious allure with which Koei seems to spice its games all conspire to make for a very enjoyable slice of frantic Eastern action.



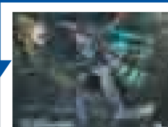
VERDICT 7/10
THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE WARRIORS SERIES THUS FAR

DYNASTY WARRIORS 4XL



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

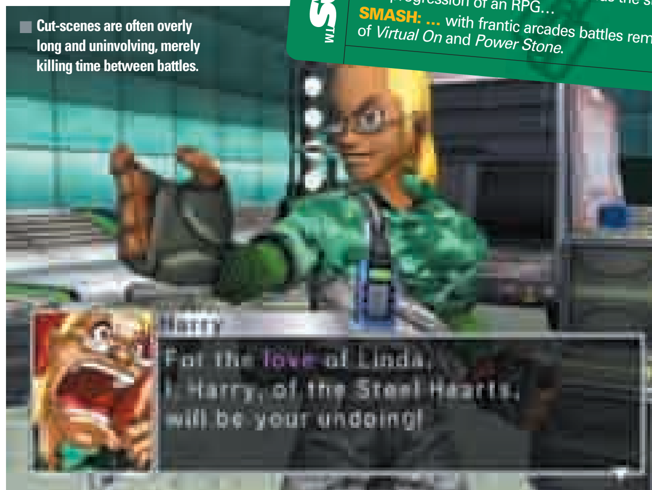


BUJINGAI

FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
ORCY TALKIE: *Custom Robo* blends the structure and progression of an RPG…
SMASH: … with frantic arcades battles reminiscent of *Virtual On* and *Power Stone*.



Every Holosseum (er, arena) has its own unique features, including magma and destructible scenery.



Cut-scenes are often overly long and uninvolving, merely killing time between battles.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED	GameCube
ORIGIN	Japan
PUBLISHER	Nintendo
DEVELOPER	NOISE
PRICE	$49.99
RELEASE	Q2 '04 (US: Out Now)
PLAYERS	1-4

As cute as they may look, most of the Robos still pack quite a punch.

ANY, ANY, ANY OLD IRON…

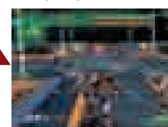
CUSTOM ROBO

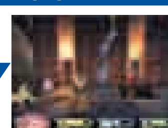
What defines a mecha game? Do we need to see a certain square footage of reinforced titanium, or does the mere sight of a remotely robotic entity merit classification? Regardless, *Custom Robo* is an update of the N64 duo that failed to reach the UK; 'update' purely by chronology, mind, as very little progression has actually taken place. As before, you talk to a lot of people, many of whom demand that you fight their miniature battle bots with your own machines, repeating this process until a) you've beaten everyone and unlocked all the parts or b) you get bored and get some friends round to sample the game in a fresh light. All well and good, but is it a mecha game?

Custom Robo certainly has all the hallmarks of a mecha title. A level of customisation akin to *MechWarrior* or *Armored Core* (albeit in a more user-friendly and simplistic fashion) means there are thousands of permutations for your robot, and with every part sporting its own stats, abilities and weak spots you'll easily find a machine that suits your needs. The real giveaways here are the stars of the show – little colourful robots that are battled like Pokémon. Like the world around them, these are relatively pleasing on the eye – especially once the battles get more heated and arenas fill with vivid blasts. If you're still not convinced as to just how robotic this is, the many unlockable parts should put it beyond all doubt. Shouldn't they?

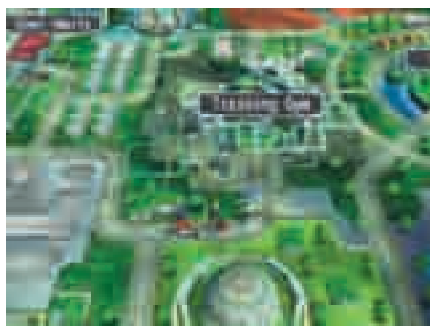
Well, not really. Battles soon take their toll on your controllers due to their frenetic nature and generally lack the strategy or refinement of many other mechanical adventures. Furthermore, linear story sections serve only to draw out the time between battles, which are the main element of the game. Ultimately, however, *Custom Robo*'s mecha-ness is of little consequence – the real question is whether the game is worth your cash. If multiplayer is likely to get a little play then this is worth a look, but if you're after something more solitary then *Custom Robo* will be gathering rust as soon as it's finished.

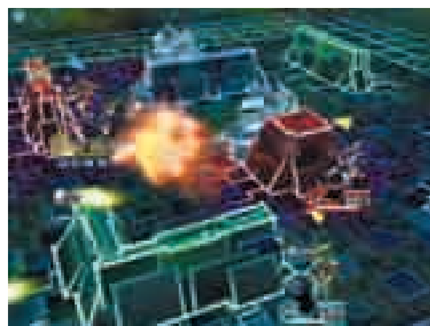
VERDICT 6/10
FAIR STORY, SHINES IN MULTIPLAYER TOO

VIRTUAL ON MARZ

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

POWER STONE 2



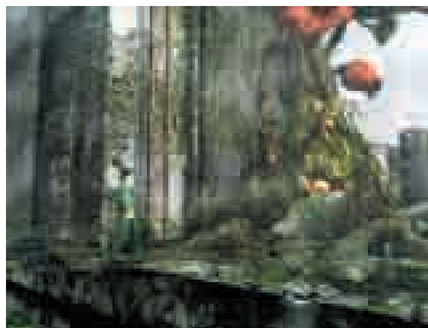


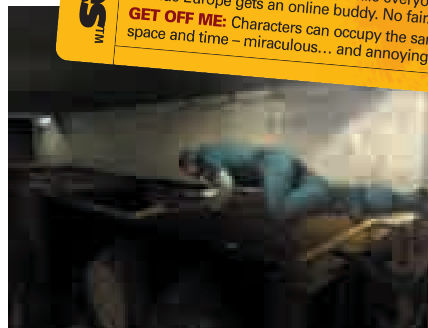



eMag

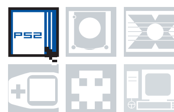
FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
TEAM PLAY: Rubbish AI here, while everyone outside Europe gets an online buddy. No fair.
GET OFF ME: Characters can occupy the same space and time – miraculous… and annoying.


"I said 'get your feet off the seats' you uncouth, undead layabout."


Yes, yes, lovely graphics and all, but this is just so frustrating.


Ah, splendid, the compulsory sneaking section. Keep the noise down…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Capcom
DEVELOPER
In-House
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
24 September
PLAYERS
1

THESE ZOMBIES REALLY DO WANT YOUR FRIENDS' BRAINS

RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK

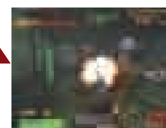
And lo, a game designed to be played online is rendered a single-player experience where human interaction is replaced with erratic AI. But just for us lucky Europeans. Great. Your eight comrades here are just ordinary citizens caught out as the T-Virus spreads through Raccoon City. Each has a skill, be they able to concoct medicines, fight with melee weapons or play dead (though whether this is actually a skill is debatable). The idea is that you must work together to survive, but with no-one to work with this is a hollow experience. *Outbreak*'s offline play couldn't highlight your loneliness better than when an NPC struts into your body, rendering you immobile. There's no mistaking their AI for the subtleties of an online player, and although you can give them basic come-here/go-there instructions they rarely obey with any level of competency. The fact is that they're dumber than a bag of hammers and we can't help feeling that your escape would be easier if you just executed every last one of them and claimed their gear.

Yes, gear. Shame you can only carry four items at a time really, but a bigger shame that some items are found underneath others and to get to one you've got to pick up both. Want a key under that paper? Haven't got two spaces free? Pick up the paper, drop it somewhere else and go back. Those of you who want to know the meaning of the word 'laborious' will be well served. *Outbreak*'s logic is almost hatefully idiosyncratic too, being a mixture of decent ideas and the mediocre. Yes, you can use a nail gun as a weapon or to fix boards to block doors, but you're only allowed to nail all the boards at once, rather than individually – waste a single nail on a zombie and you sacrifice any DIY plans.

Sadly, great ideas that are poorly implemented must be seen as bad ideas. If they don't work, what's the point? Part of *Resident Evil*'s charm is its conventions that have remained since Jill Valentine first wondered if that really was Chris' blood. *Outbreak* keeps the find-the-key mechanic and the herbs then adds some tricks of its own, like loading times that see you waiting over ten seconds for stairwells that take three seconds to navigate followed by another lengthy load. Sorry, Capcom, but we have to ask: why innovate if you're just going to irritate?

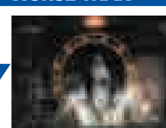

If the zombies are only after brains your AI teammates will be perfectly safe.

GUN SURVIVOR 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

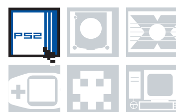


PROJECT ZERO II: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

VERDICT 3/10
A SLOW-LOADING, AWKWARD NIGHTMARE


eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

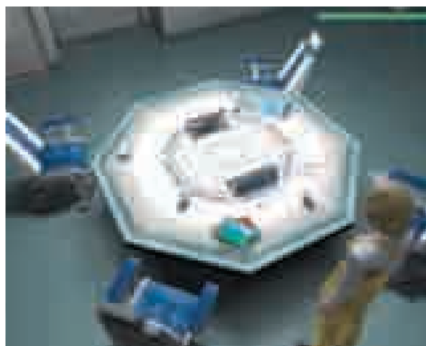
PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1



Searching can be complicated by having to spell everything out to Rio.



Enemies have specific weak points but battles are still a little ropey.



LIFELINE

TRY TALKING YOUR WAY OUT OF THIS ONE…

Every now and then we're offered a glimpse of the future of gaming – a peek at how we could all be playing games a few years down the line. *EyeToy: Play* brought a new dimension to party games, *PGR2* took online and single-player integration to a new level, and thanks to *SingStar*, *Dancing Stage* et al, gaming will never again be all about who has the most dextrous thumbs. But while it isn't too hard for a USB microphone to detect and grade musical notes, recognising and responding to speech is much more difficult to integrate into a game. Titles like *Seaman* and *Hey You, Pikachu!* strolled boldly into unknown territory then stumbled. But now, as minor integration into the likes of *Rainbow Six 3* made it look like full voice control was a failed experiment, here's a game that proves the doubters… well, more or less right.

Lifeline gets off to a superb start but starts to slip away soon after. The premise is ingenious – trapped in the communication centre of a space station hotel overrun with aliens, you must use a vast range of voice commands to help waitress Rio defeat the intruders. The main problem with the broad dictionary is one of recognition, and while the technology here is extremely impressive, confusion is all but inevitable. Also annoying are the constant guessing games – occasionally Rio will be at a loss for words (formulating a cunning plan but forgetting the name of a vital element, for example) and it's up to you to run off a list of possible words (which, in fairness, are varied and well responded to) until you hit upon the correct one by chance, skill or deduction. A similar process

games™ FINGERPRINT

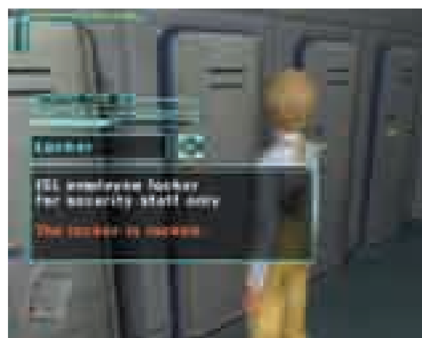
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

KEEP TALKING: Almost every command in the game is available exclusively through conversation.

PERSONAL: Rio's bubbly and chatty nature genuinely helps you to want to save her.



The outer-space hotel setting means you can fight unfamiliar enemies in a reasonably civilised environment.



HEY YOU, PIKACHU!
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS
SEAMAN

FIGHTING FIT

Perhaps if it weren't for the combat, *Lifeline*'s flaws would be forgivable – it's really not so bad just running around a room trying to get Rio to recognise all of the clues, but when coupled with battles that use the same mechanics despite a life-threatening sense of urgency, things start to fall apart. Using a controller, there's a simple recognition/response/action procedure that ensures you're in complete control of your character, and although that isn't the idea of *Lifeline*, the lack of any real freedom of thought on Rio's part makes it feel more like playing with a damaged joypad than actually instructing somebody. That said, the combat does succeed in half of its task by causing great panic and urgency – whether this is intentional or merely a by-product of the clumsy control is another matter…





FAQs

Q. HOW MANY WORDS DOES THE GAME RECOGNISE?
Over 5,000 individual words and hundreds of thousands of composite phrases – no wonder Rio gets confused.

Q. DO I NEED TO PUT ON AN ACCENT?
Unlike most US voice recognition titles, *Lifeline* picks us up just fine. Except words like 'data' and 'route'.

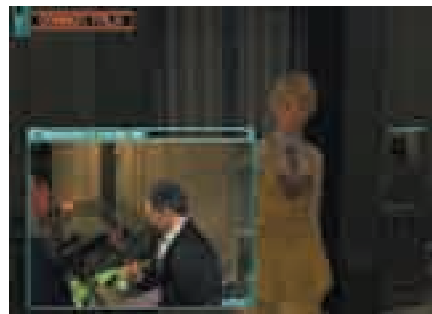
Q. HOW DOES IT WORK?
It's very clever, or perhaps magic. Download the PC demo from www.konami.com/lifeline and see if you can work it out…

Rio finds the handgun early on and, luckily for her, the owner left an infinite amount of ammo too. Which is nice.



It's possible to sustain fairly coherent conversations with Rio, though real-life women will do this for less than $40…

This is the part where you scream 'Run away, you foolish woman!' down the headset… Will she listen? Or just be all contrary?



applies when exploring, and although key items are highlighted in each area, it's up to you to name them (or at least describe them) in order to get Rio's attention. This can be harder than you might think, especially when what you thought was a cushion turns out to be a briefcase.

But while sheer ambition turns much of *Lifeline*'s gameplay to frustrating mediocrity, the attention to detail and attitude of the product is little short of stunning. Rio often elaborates on even the slightest point of a conversation or retaliates to obscure or vulgar commands with some superb comebacks – one session of constant misunderstandings led to an uncontrollable outburst of expletives down the headset, causing Rio to go off on a wonderful rant about our terrible attitude. This sparked a barrage of random insults between man and AI (purely in the interests of research), but, unfortunately, Rio seems to live by the old 'sticks and stones' adage and barely worked up a sweat in the profane firefight. Curses.

With notches like *Silent Hill 3* and *Metal Gear Solid 2* in its graphical bedpost, we know Konami can produce better than what's on show here. All around the space station functionality is the order of the day, which in light of the ridiculous depth of the game's vocabulary can almost be excused but is still something of a shame, especially given some of the more first-generation characters and locales you'll encounter. Speech is the polar opposite, however, and while a few of Rio's lines let the side down, they are, for the most part, absolutely wonderfully delivered, and this above all else – the fact that the plight of this trapped woman verges on believable at times despite the outer-space setting – is what saves the game from being just another interesting tech demo.

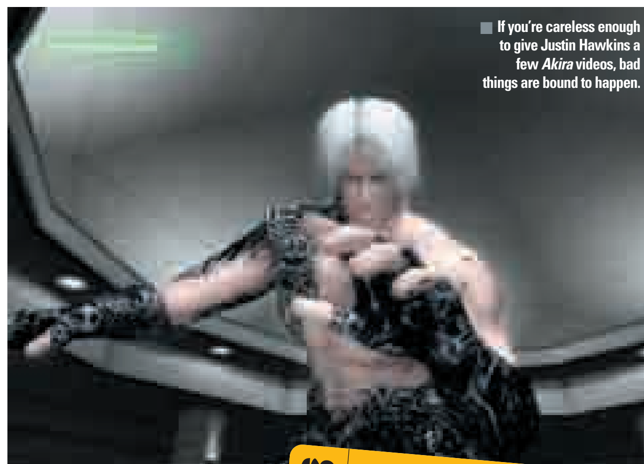
In the same way that the world has developed an acceptance for concept albums and experimental film, *Lifeline* is a rare commodity that may one day be seen by the masses in the light in which it was intended; a concept videogame and an extremely impressive one at that. What it lacks in solidity and precision it more than makes up for with an experience unlike any other, and while it does get horribly frustrating when Rio mistakes a phrase for 'recover' and uses her last health pack in vain, there's a definite allure to the game that somehow transcends the sum of its oh-so-varied parts. Based purely on the fact that the voice recognition software – the fundamental element of the game – is simply not tight enough to bind *Lifeline* into a coherent adventure, it's with some remorse that we bestow upon it a fairly low score, but don't let it fool you. The game is already falling in price in the US, so anyone with the means to play *Lifeline* shouldn't let a chance to sample this unique title pass them by.

VERDICT 4/10
A BRAVE VENTURE THAT JUST FALLS SHORT


eMag



Alex will help you out when she's around and not off somewhere doing… something else.



If you're careless enough to give Justin Hawkins a few *Akira* videos, bad things are bound to happen.



BREAKDOWN

BRINGING NEW MEANING TO THE TERM 'HANDS-ON GAMEPLAY'

DETAILS

FORMAT
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
25 June

PLAYERS
1

BETTER THAN
THE SUFFERING

WORSE THAN
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's always the way. You barely survive a huge explosion only to regain consciousness and find out you've been the subject of some twisted scientific experiments. And that's the premise of *Breakdown*. Yet despite taking place in a research centre somewhere between *Resident Evil* and *Deus Ex*, it's hard to categorise this game. Why? Because it's basically a beat-'em-up, shoot-'em-up and adventure all rolled into one, with a little surrealism thrown in.

Your primary goal is obviously to escape, having been saved by a female soldier called Alex who knows a lot more about your past than you do. She isn't just the token bundle of bounce to keep the one-handed gamers happy either, and as the story develops she plays an integral part in the game. True, she may disappear from time to time but she's always there to lend a hand – and also to make you chuck up a dodgy burger or throw you off a tall building. Bless.

Breakdown is undoubtedly a fine-looking piece of work with impressive accuracy and realism, thanks in part to the first-person view that really does give the impression of looking through the hero's eyes. This can be disorientating at first, but the narrow line of vision not only draws you deeper into the character, but gives you the chance to appreciate the finer detail that has gone into bringing life to the crisp and clean visuals. You will get a pistol but much of the combat (against cyborgs, mostly) is carried out with your fists.

Unfortunately, while this innovation is certainly refreshing, the fact that the game is generally incredibly linear manages to detract greatly from the overall experience, and with the rare battle sequences punctuated with long periods of samey corridor exploration, it soon gets tiring. It's a shame, because *Breakdown* doesn't fit into the casual stereotypes of any genre demanding button-bashing fight sequences or hours of gratuitous guns and bombs action, meaning you get the fun bits from both worlds held together with a fairly comfortable control system. If only Namco had put a bit more variation into the actual content of the game instead of placing all the emphasis on the innovative interface, this might have been more than just a good starting point for the future.





It might be a top-secret, highly suspect laboratory, but even evil scientists need generic, non-brand cola.

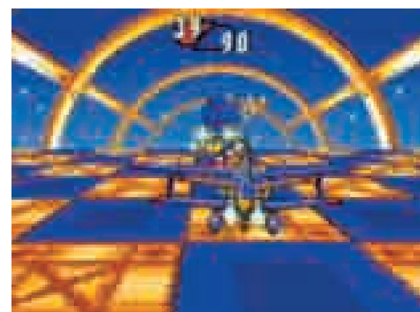
VERDICT 5/10
SOME GOOD IDEAS, BUT FAR TOO LINEAR

■ Eggman's got some cunning new machines up his sleeve, though some of them look very similar to ones we've seen before…





■ Each act can be completed without much help from your partner, but proper exploration usually requires some kind of assistance.





DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Sonic Team

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
25 June

PLAYERS
1-4

SONIC ADVANCE 3

THIRD TIME'S A CHARM FOR SEGA'S PERSISTENT MASCOT

Poor Sonic's had a rough time of it lately. Despite once being SEGA's poster boy (or rather, hedgehog), his recent outings have been incredibly lacklustre. Is Sonic Team trying to be too clever for its own good? Perhaps – with both *Sonic Advance 2* and *Sonic Heroes* relying too much on gimmicks and new faces rather than gameplay, we'd almost lost faith entirely.

That *Sonic Advance 3* sounds as if it follows in its predecessor's footsteps doesn't help matters. However, despite all the gimmicks (such as multiple characters, hidden Chao creatures and all sorts of unimportant plot details), this is one of the most traditional Sonic games we've played in ages. This is mostly down to the carefully crafted level design; rather than the last game's shallow stages, *Sonic Advance 3* features acts that are far more faithful to the ethos of the original games, balancing speed with precision jumping and well-timed attacks that make you think before you dash.

That's not to say *Sonic Advance 3* is devoid of novelties, it's just that they now bolster the gameplay rather than dilute it. Some, such as the rudimentary hub system in each world and life-earning mini-games, are fairly inconsequential, although the game's different characters do mix things up a little. Should you explore each stage properly rather than speed through in trademark Sonic style, you may find yourself needing to switch from the obvious combination of Sonic and Tails; certain tag-team moves, such as Knuckles' Wall Climb or Amy's Hammer Toss, can help you reach otherwise inaccessible areas. This patient exploration is the only way to find all the hidden Chao, which in turn unlock the Chaos Emerald stages that let you complete the game properly.

Surprisingly, it's this split between the game's determination to showcase new elements while reintroducing more traditional gameplay that makes *Sonic Advance 3* such a success; there's something here for everyone, no matter which era of Sonic you prefer. If that's not enough to restore some faith in SEGA's spiky hero, we don't know what is.

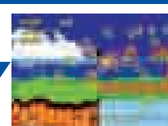
VERDICT 7/10
EASILY THE BEST SONIC TITLE FOR A LONG TIME

SONIC ADVANCE 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2


eMag





Don't worry too much about targeting and stuff – just shoot indiscriminately.



SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN

A GAME SO LONG IN DEVELOPMENT THE LEAD CHARACTER RETIRED…

DETAILS



FORMAT
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
25 June

PLAYERS
1-2 (1-4 online)

So, after two years of promises, the fourth *Syphon Filter* game finally crawls out of its development hole and asks 'Remember me?'. Or rather, desperately rasps 'Don't forget about me'. Sadly, *Omega Strain* is an odd jumble of elements that keeps one eye on its ultimate aims but stops just short of achieving them. That's not to say the game is without merits – it's just that they fail to gel into any sort of cohesive gaming experience.

Level design manages to keep the action moving at a focused pace and encourages self-improvement through replay, as completing the game at 100 per cent is required to unlock the four bonus levels. Likewise, *Omega Strain* doesn't disappoint on the weapons front, and anybody who enjoyed previous instalments for their selection of small arms and gadgets will easily slip back into the routine they began on PSone. No, the resounding factors in *Syphon Filter*'s collapse are instead the control method and the camera, both of which do their utmost to ruin an otherwise perfectly acceptable action game.

With the departure of protagonist Gabe Logan (though he can be controlled in one bonus mission), playable characters can be created and customised before the game begins (if you make it past the awful front end). From the way the characters run, you could be forgiven for thinking Gabe was in charge of their training, as they've all inherited his PSone slide across the floor, wiggling hips and pushing out posteriors like J-Lo wannabes. Meanwhile, the camera sits as though connected to your hero's waist with an invisible tow-bar. Another weakness seems to be the actual shooting, which requires minimum effort and maximum side-to-side strafing, making it look like your character has entered a ballroom with a polishing rag tied to the sole of each shoe.

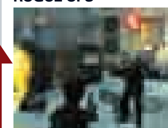


Make your own gag about 'hanging around' for this sequel…

Sadly, not even the benefit of online co-operative play is enough to recommend *The Omega Strain*. Are we being harsh? Perhaps, but the genre has moved on, and after over two years in the making we expected more than a basic continuation of the PSone game complete with all the trappings of that generation's first clutch of action titles.

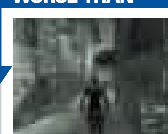
VERDICT 4/10
NOT A FAILURE – JUST FRUSTRATING AND AVERAGE

BETTER THAN



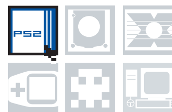
ROGUE OPS

WORSE THAN



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Mastiff

DEVELOPER
Nippon Ichi

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

YOU BRING ME CLOSER TO GOD

LA PUCELLE: TACTICS



We'd like to propose an eight-day week. The new day – tentatively titled Strateday – will be dedicated to mind-based pursuits, be it chess, studying or a few hours of hard mental graft *Advance Wars*-style. The idea is that this extra 24 hours will give gamers enough time to do the many strategy titles of the last year justice – it doesn't take a genius to work out that without this we'll never get to play even half of them at any length. So please, write a letter, sign a petition, anything… just help us make sure we get a chance to give these games the time they deserve. In the meantime, let us show you around Nippon Ichi's latest life-wrecking strategy epic.

When it comes to statistics Nippon Ichi never holds back with depth or potential, and despite a lengthy and useful tutorial, *La Pucelle* is no exception. Battle your way through countless encounters with the forces of evil, all tied together with the same attitude-laced cut-scenes and conversations with which Nippon Ichi is now synonymous. What starts off as a pretty intense (and intensely pretty) set of battles and rules soon becomes the norm, and while the depth of *Disgaea* simply isn't present, there's more than enough here to please the more cerebral gamer.

The system of channelling dark energy is similarly daunting at first – basically, characters can be placed on a flow to redirect it towards enemies or, for the ultimate attack, surround an area to call forth a powerful Summon to see off everyone in it. The same purification process can be applied to enemies, making it possible for just about any enemy you face to be converted to your noble cause. Two great concepts, sure, but with the suitably busy nature of the game it can be tricky to use either effectively in practice.



Battles are individually animated, cutting to scenes like this as opposed to happening in the field.

But while *La Pucelle* clearly comes from the same school as *Disgaea*, it has marginally lower grades across the board. The same brand of great dialogue is here, as are the beautifully drawn sprites and settings, but the whole product just doesn't bond to the same exceptional degree that *Disgaea* did. It's getting to the point where developers are going to have to think long and hard before throwing a title into this genre. With Nippon Ichi and Intelligent Systems producing gem after gem, it'll take one hell of a manoeuvre to steal their thunder.

As in *Disgaea*, hard work is rewarded with bigger and bigger numerical figures throughout the game.



VERDICT 8/10
ANOTHER SUPERB FEAT OF STRATEGY GAMING

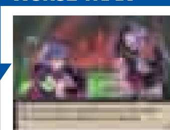


ONIMUSHA TACTICS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

Play areas are notably larger than in many similar titles


eMag









NO 2D KOURNIKOVA? YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS…

SMASH COURT TENNIS PRO TOURNAMENT 2

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (1-4 via Multi-tap)

As Spinal Tap's Nigel Tufnel once pointed out, there's such a fine line between stupid and clever. You know, like when an idea sounds so good in your head but falls flat on its face when blurted out? Apply the same theory to games and you've got the basis of this experiment (for want of a more favourable description). In a desperate bid to make *SCTPT2* feel a little different to every other tennis title in the growing market, Namco has taken a drastic step with the main Career mode – one that, like some of the most theoretically sound ideas, may not have been so smart in practice. Basically, rather than wading through an entire match (which can be a laborious process in certain titles), encounters are played out for you by the CPU until pivotal points where you pick up the action for a single game to determine the outcome of the set. Interesting and original, yes. But at the expense of a rewarding, fair and involving experience? No thanks.

The real shame here is that Namco has obviously toiled over the basics of the game, and to good effect – control easily rivals *Virtua Tennis* and *Top Spin* even if it can't quite eclipse them. All manner of multiplayer modes play out fairly well and even the single-player competitions are, while tough, as enjoyable as just about any other tennis title this generation… once you get to grips with them, that is. Gone are the days when *Smash Court* was easy to play, and the presentation will disappoint gamers who long for the joys of Bomb Tennis. It's only these petty quibbles that drop *SCTPT2* a few places down the food chain, but as the shelves fill with competitors there are simply many more titles to outdo.

Sadly, this seems to be a series in decline. The original PSone game and its licensed sequel still provide some of the best multiplayer japes on the console but, for us, neither of the PS2 updates have captured the magic or sheer playability of their forerunners. Whether the shift in direction – from playful and accessible to serious realism – is due to the decline in 2D and 'cutesy' titles, *Virtua Tennis*' dominance in the 'pick-up-and-play' field, or simply progression on the part of the developer is unclear. However, we can only hope that future additions to the franchise will see Namco returning to the glorious foundations that have kept the series running this long. The verdict? File under 'Stupid' for the Career mode and 'Clever' for most everything else…



VERDICT 6/10
FLAWED CAREER MARS AN OTHERWISE GREAT TITLE

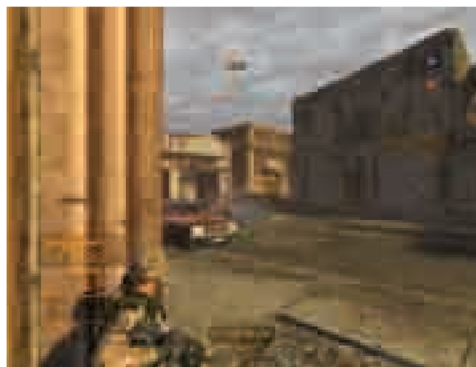


Whip out a Multi-tap and the action is frenzied and enjoyable. Get ready to blame your partner a lot…

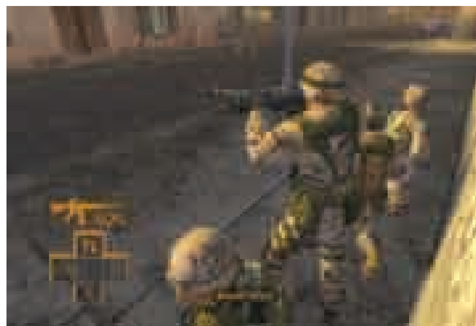




There's the target. Your men won't fire until you give the order, maintaining the realistic nature of the game's combat system.



It's tempting to go around lobbing grenades to flush out your enemies (who definitely aren't Iraqi, oh no…), but a softly-softly approach is advised.





War is hell; just ask this chap who was only trying to defend his wife and children…



Use one squad to cover the other, ensuring that no one will be able to sneak up and take pot shots at them.

PANDEMIC IS TAKING WAR VERY SERIOUSLY…

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Pandemic

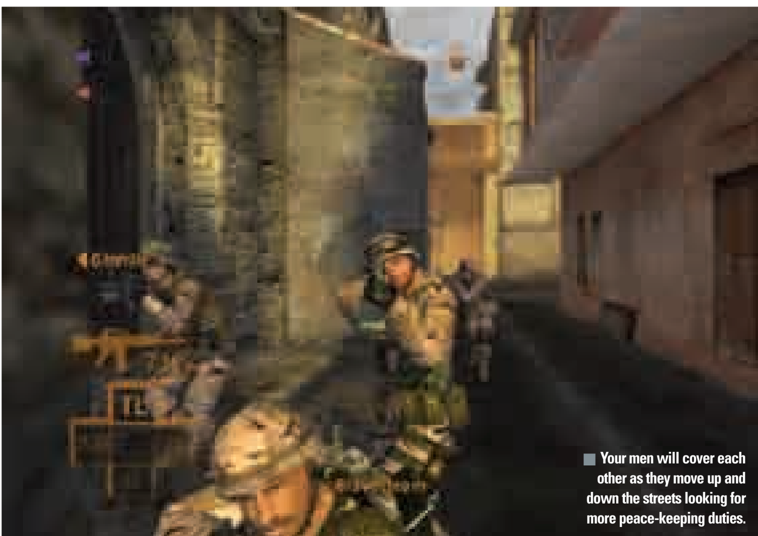
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-2

There's something intensely morbid about the number of war games on the Xbox at the moment, especially as each one is attempting to 'out war' the others in terms of bloody realism and modern-life friendly empathy. Pandemic's shooter represents one end of this spectrum (forgive the pun), as it's adapted from the simulator commissioned by the US government to train its troops for urban warfare. In a way, this is the most realistic war game you're likely to play. Indeed, such is the appeal to the serious combat type (you know, the ones who go paintballing every weekend), that it goes without saying that this game would be a huge commercial hit in the US even if it was repetitive and a little too serious for its own good. The great news for THQ is that none of these criticisms apply, as *Full Spectrum Warrior* is a strangely addictive war sim that appeals more to the brain than the adrenal glands.

You'll take control of two groups, Alpha and Bravo, consisting of four men apiece, with the aim of the game being to move your teams, very much like chess pieces, through various objectives. It's as easy as that. Along the way you'll have to



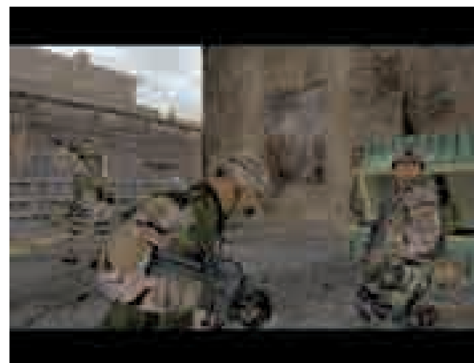
Your men will cover each other as they move up and down the streets looking for more peace-keeping duties.

FAQs

Q. FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR, YOU SAY?
That's right – Full Spectrum Warrior is the US military term for a combat-ready soldier.

Q. DO I HAVE, LIKE, GUNS?
The game is very serious, so you'll have to use tactics to progress. This is no ordinary shooter.

Q. BIT CONTROVERSIAL, ISN'T IT?
The game itself is not set in Iraq, but is instead based around a fictional Arab state very similar to the one in the news…



Your game is saved when you deliver a situation report. This fits in with the game's theme effortlessly.

games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

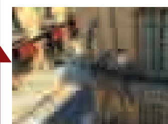
FRIENDLY FIRE: *FSW* has nothing out of character such as deathmatch modes, but boasts a Live-aware Co-op mode. Fancy taking part in the Gulf War with a buddy, minus the chance of getting killed? Bingo.

COVER YOUR PRIVATES

Full Spectrum Warrior **is heavily biased towards finding an alternative to head-on combat. Using the GPS device you can scout out the level and plan a route that puts your troops in better positions. The ideal is a direct shot in your enemy's back while he's unaware of your presence, but to do this you'll need to use both squads to cover each other. Switching between Alpha and Bravo is simple, and the two have decent enough AI to look after themselves while you're with the other squad. When all else fails, however, direct combat is necessary. You can use smoke grenades to cover your troops' movements, lob a frag to take out an enemy who's behind cover, or blow them away from afar with the M4 grenade launcher. *FSW* offers choices that only high levels of realism make possible.**

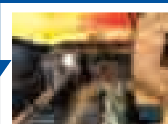


BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX 3

use tactics and various firearms to reach the objectives, but considering the complex nature of modern urban warfare, the game is remarkably easy to control. The training is tedious, 101 hand-holding, but it only seems this way because the controls have been so carefully chosen and implemented, giving the player a great feeling of leadership from the word go.

One aspect of the game that has been mentioned repeatedly in all the previews is that the player has no real control over where their men fire; you simply set a fire-sector to shoot at a target, or lob one of the all-important frag grenades. This part of the gameplay was a bold move by Pandemic, who must have known full well that the FPS genre is the Xbox's forte. Denying gamers that element of control is a gamble that pays off, however, as it compels you to think about how to approach different conflicts and unexplored areas. Real soldiers in the Gulf would not rush into an opening and trust their trigger fingers against an enemy; instead, the emphasis would be on preserving their own life and eliminating the threat from a fortified position. The game reflects this spirit to a tee and chances are that if you dash into open ground with no covering fire you'll be treated to a blood-stained, slow-motion death. Lose two of your boys and it's game over.

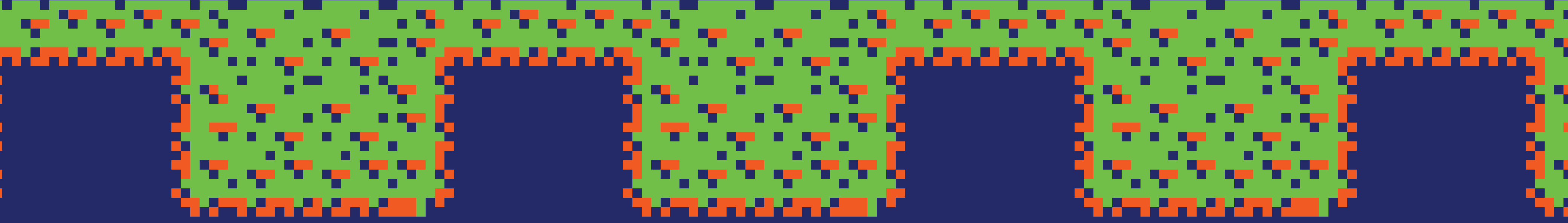
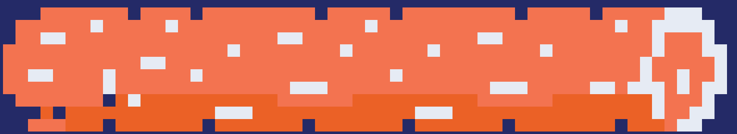
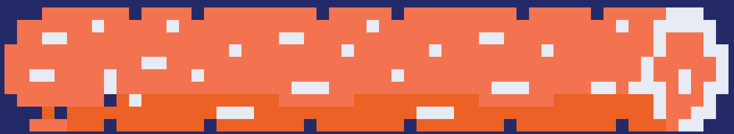
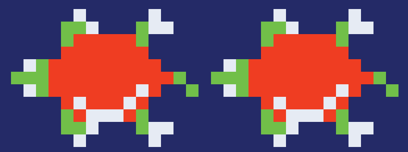
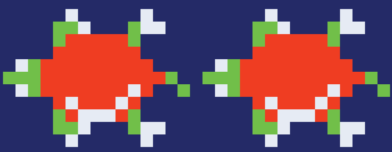
Of course, the real Army simulation teaches players to limit the casualties to zero, but a game that strict would not be as welcome on home consoles. In fact, the difficulty balance has been well implemented by Pandemic, and the player will soon find themselves really in control as they outflank enemy machine-gun placements and RPGs while rescuing downed comrades and assisting in firefights. Calling in a mortar bombardment, using recon helicopters and checking a handheld GPS device are all great extras that help to mix up the gameplay every once in a while. Your soldiers' banter is great to hear, too, as it makes an attempt at some kind of emotional connection between the player and his pixellated units.

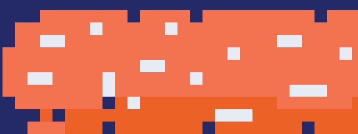
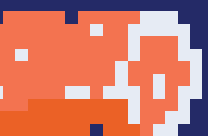
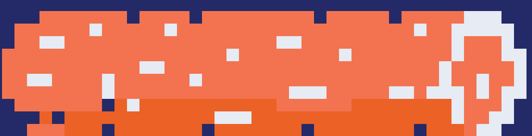
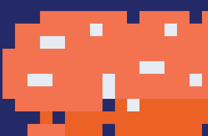
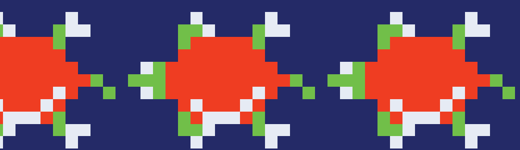
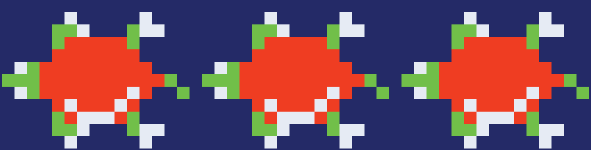
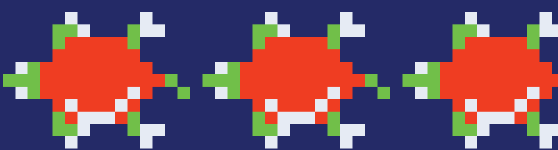
So, with smooth gameplay mechanics, excellent visuals and some neat little sound effects and classical scores, surely *Full Spectrum Warrior* is about as good a sim game as you're likely to find on home consoles? Well, yes, to an extent, and the game is really only let down by its niche appeal and occasionally repetitive action. The fact that your men sometimes seem like they couldn't hit a barn door at 50 paces is annoying, and the AI can be ropey, as your troops will happily charge in front of a squad laying down suppression fire to avoid an obstacle, and will subsequently be cut to ribbons by friendly fire. Whether this is black-humoured realism on behalf of Pandemic is irrelevant, because it can be intensely irritating. However, aside from these few niggles, *Full Spectrum Warrior* is the real deal, and anyone after something more cerebral than another heavy dose of gunning down swathes of [insert fashionable victim here] should seriously consider tracking this one down. War is finally good for something…

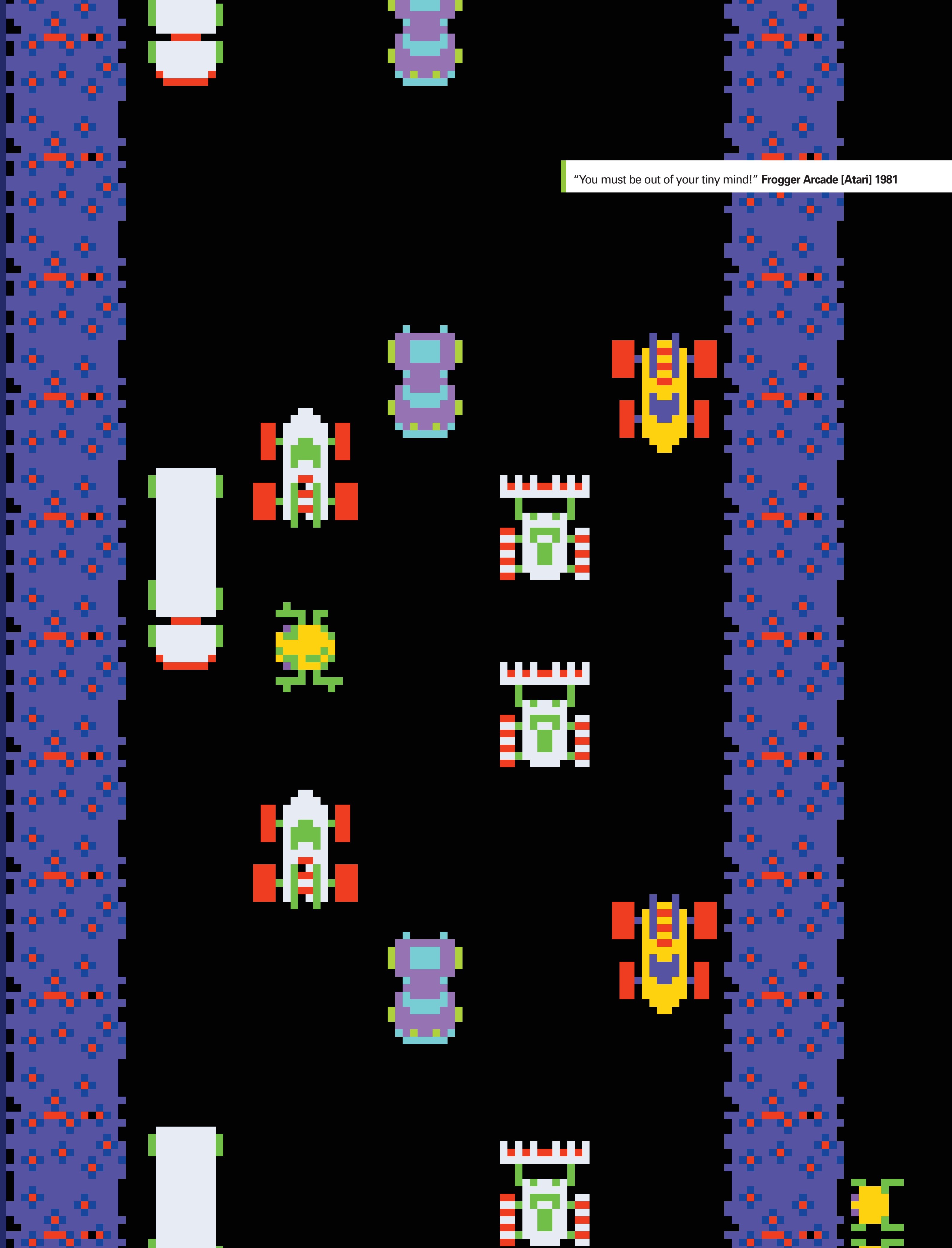
VERDICT 7/10

A SIMPLE CONCEPT EXECUTED WITH MILITARY PRECISION

1-UP HI-SCORE
00050 04630



"You must be out of your tiny mind!" **Frogger Arcade [Atari] 1981**


eMag

A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.20 JULY 2004
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RETRO

MICRO GAMES ACTION

THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW

RETROSPECTIVE WITH DAN PHILLIPS, THE HERO OF ARMALYTE

CLASSIC MACHINE: SEGA MEGA CD

WE TAKE A TRIP TO RETROKADE, THE BEST ARCADE EVER!

RETRO REVIEWS

Space Harrier, Devil Crash, Road Avenger

DONKEY KONG FAMILY TREE

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KNIGHTLORE

THE GREATEST RETRO GAME EVER!

Star Games

DISCOVER A GREMLIN'S FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME

CLASSIC GAME SYSTEM BUYERS' GUIDE

Retro News

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming...

After spending a day at the excellent Retrokade (see pages 144-7) it's easy to bang on about the good old days. Of course, this isn't strictly true – there's no way I could live without my weekly blast on *Halo* – but it does make you wonder why so many people think old games are better.

One factor could well be time; as we get older, priorities change and playtime gets shorter. Whether it's because of jobs, families or other facets of everyday life, it's not always possible to dedicate over 20 hours to the latest games.

Arcade games are a perfect substitute; they offer short but extremely frenetic bursts of gameplay. The same can also be said for a lot of the older 8- and 16-bit machines.

Inviting friends round for the evening to proudly show off my latest purchases I was asked "Where's your SNES gone? We want to play *Mario Kart*." Watching everyone taking it in turns to pass the two SNES pads around, I realised why certain titles stand the test of time. Regardless of whether a title takes 20 hours or 20 minutes to complete, a good game will always be a good game and that's what makes them timeless.

Darran Jones, Retro Editor

To be this good takes SEGA

Software giant launches new hardware

New SEGA hardware? You read right. But before you run into the streets to rejoice, we should mention that it's not actually a new console. Thanks to the success of plug-and-play games like *Namco 5-in-1 Arcade Classics*, SEGA has decided to release its own version.

Available in time for Christmas, SEGA's new machine (launched in Europe by peripheral firm Radica) will be plug-and-play and based around its highly successful Mega Drive. It will also come pre-loaded with five classic SEGA hits, including *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Altered Beast* and *Golden Axe*. The device is expected to retail for £29.99, which will save you splashing out on a Mega Drive if you don't already have one. The titles are apparently identical to their cartridge counterparts and will be the first of many such units to be released throughout the year.

If the thought of playing classic SEGA games doesn't appeal to you, however, you'll also be pleased to know that you'll soon be able to get your hands on even more plug-and-play items, including ones based on Taito, C64 and LucasArts games. Let's just hope they include *The Secret Of Monkey Island* on that last machine…



▲ Too tight to buy an old Mega Drive and some games? Prise open your wallet for a SEGA plug-and-play, then.

And About Time Too

It's taken its sweet time, but Nintendo's highly successful limited edition Famicom SP is finally appearing in Europe. Available from 9 July, the system will feature the same retro box art as its NTSC peers and will be launched with eight of the original ten titles. Each game will cost a paltry 20 euros (around £14) and titles include *Super Mario Bros*, *Donkey Kong*, *Ice Climber*, *Excitebike*, *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Pac-Man*, *Xevious* and *Bomberman* – a great selection of classic NES games.

Capcom Cashes In On Consoles

Street Fighter Anniversary Collection on Xbox

Following the news that the PlayStation2 will finally be getting its own version of the excellent *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, Capcom has decided to go one better for the Xbox release of the *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*.

Due out at the end of the year, the Xbox version will include all the extras that made it into the PS2 *Anniversary Collection*, but will also include *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. But that's not all, as the bumper package is going to be playable online as well, which is fantastic news for *Street Fighter* fans.

Of course, after playing *Capcom Vs SNK 2: Live EO* online, we're not too sure how *3rd Strike*'s intricate parrying system will fare, but at least the Live option is there if you wish to use it. Plus, the fact that Xbox owners will be getting one of the best Dreamcast fighters for free instead of having to pay extra is bound to please a lot of people.

This Month In 1995

Nintendo showed us a monochrome view of the future in 3D, but it was still more colourful than grey John Major…

GAMING NEWS JULY '95

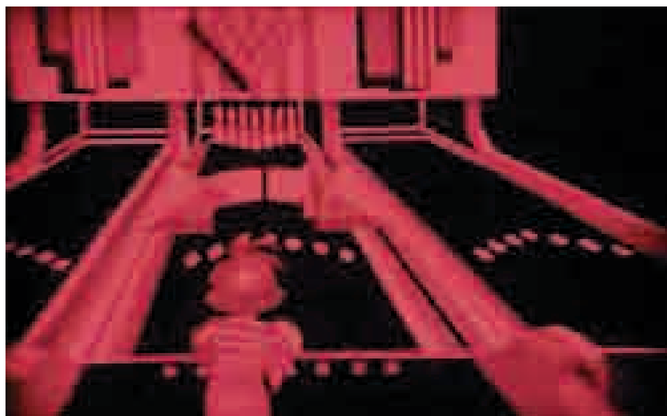
Nintendo's new machine fails to impress

July 1995 saw the launch of Nintendo's brand new console – the revolutionary Virtual Boy – which proved that even a company as powerful as the big N wasn't infallible. Created by Game Boy designer Gunpei Yokoi, the Virtual Boy was Nintendo's attempt to cash in on the public's interest in virtual reality.

The Virtual Boy used a pair of 1x224 linear arrays, which were then scanned pass the player's field of vision by rapidly spinning curved mirrors. As well as creating a loud mechanical hum, the spinning mirrors would allow the player to see the Virtual Boy's distinctive monochrome 3D visuals.

Unfortunately, several important factors stopped Nintendo's machine from becoming a success, and when the system was finally cancelled only 22 games had been created for it. Factors contributing to the machine's demise included the fact that it wasn't as portable as Nintendo had first stated, safety warnings on the side of the box put off many prospective buyers, and the display itself could cause headaches (and rumoured eye disorders for children under seven).

Perhaps the biggest problem, however, was that many of the games simply weren't that fun to play and lacked the typical Nintendo magic that everyone was expecting from this interesting new console.



▲ You can practically hear the clatter of the pins and the squeak of the bowling shoes it's so realistic…

UK Charts in July 1995

1. **Boom Boom Boom**
   Outhere Brothers
2. **Unchained Melody/ White Cliffs of Dover**
   Robson Green/Jerome Flynn
3. **Shy Guy**
   Diana King
4. **Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me, Kill Me**
   U2
5. **A Girl Like You**
   Edwyn Collins
6. **Alright/Time**
   Supergrass
7. **Whoomph! (There It Is)**
   Clock
8. **In The Summertime**
   Shaggy featuring Rayvon
9. **I'm A Believer**
   EMF/Reeves and Mortimer
10. **Kiss From A Rose**
    Seal

Arcade games you were playing in 1995

1. **Crypt Killer**
   Konami
2. **Pang! 3**
   Mitchell
3. **SEGA Rally Championship**
   SEGA
4. **Fighting Vipers**
   SEGA
5. **Real Bout Fatal Fury**
   SNK
6. **Manx TT**
   SEGA
7. **Soccer Superstars**
   Konami
8. **Alpine Racer**
   Namco
9. **Tekken 2**
   Namco
10. **Decathlete**
    SEGA

Major Stays In

John Major wins Tory leadership battle

On 4 July, Prime Minister John Major retained his position as leader of the Conservative Party, after winning a landslide victory against challenger John Redwood. Major managed to gain the backing of 218 of the party's MPs, while Redwood only managed to win 89 votes.

"I believe that has put to rest any question and speculation about the leadership of the Conservative Party up to and beyond the next general election," said a jubilant Major. He had resigned in June in order to force a leadership election, possibly to bring to an end divisions within the party over the UK's entry into Europe.

Welsh Secretary Redwood initially attracted votes from Tories who wanted to see a tougher approach from the party. Unfortunately for Redwood, his cold demeanour – which earned him the nickname 'Mr Spock' – soon saw him out of favour. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Redwood was not included in the Cabinet when Major implemented a reshuffle after he retook his post as Prime Minister.

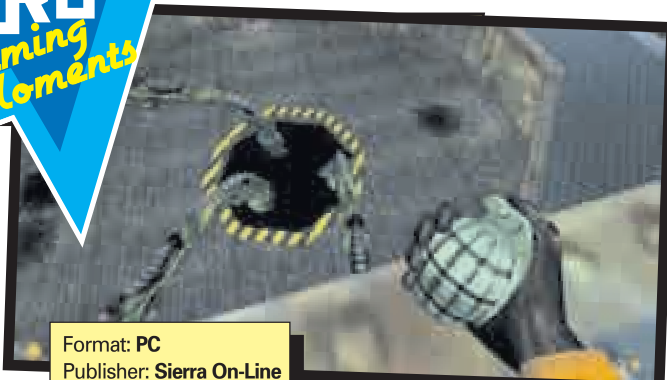
Major resigned as Tory leader in 1997 when Labour swept to power in the general election.

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

H•A•L•F-L•I•F•E

Half-Life's defining moment comes early, when Gordon Freeman enters the Blast Pit and stumbles into the path of three giant tentacles that have taken up residence in the silo. Freeman looks on as the tentacles kill a scientist, before crushing a security guard who foolishly tries to shoot it with his pistol. Ordinary weapons clearly have no effect on this creature, and there doesn't seem an obvious way past as the tentacles ferociously slam against the metal platforms you need to cross. How are you going to get past?

While the dramatic change in pace worked well, what really impressed is how this encounter subverted traditional 'shoot first' FPS traditions by asking you to assess the situation and tackle it without attacking the enemy. True, the answer to the puzzle is handed to you by the surviving security guard (he tells you the monster can't see and responds to noise), yet it was the execution of the solution rather than the mental exertion required to get there that gave this set piece its kick. You had to grab the nearby grenades and throw them to the far end of the silo to distract the tentacles. While they investigated the explosion, this gave you the chance to crawl along the platforms and down the ladders to safety. Even this was unnerving as the clanging of the tentacles echoed ominously around the silo, and any sound from you – whether from your weapons or footsteps – would give you away. This great retro gaming moment ended when you passed safely, switched on the fuel and oxygen supply, and watched your nemesis burn from the shelter of the Fire Test Control Room.



Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Sierra On-Line**
Developer: **Valve**
Release Date: **1998**



GREAT GAME BOSSES



SUNSET RIDERS

It's the old cliché of videogames that the best way to defeat bosses is to learn and memorise their attack patterns. It almost goes without saying that a few lives or credits will be wasted as you experiment to discover the ideal tactics, then commit their attack pattern to memory and strike accordingly. The Smith Brothers stick in our mind as a memorable boss battle because they could be beaten on the first attempt via nimble fingers and ingenious use of the environment without dumbing down the difficulty. No memorisation of attack patterns required at all. Well, not if you're a good enough gamer…

The fight took place in a bar where the top-hat-wearing brothers had taken three women hostage. One brother was on the top-left balcony throwing grenades at you while the other sat on the opposite balcony chucking lanterns that set the ground on fire. The trick to this fight was the swinging chandelier between the duo, which you could hang from or jump onto.

You needed to climb the chandelier to get a clear shot at the villains anyway, who were otherwise guarded from your bullets by some surprisingly sturdy 'Saloon' signs. However, you had even less time to react to the grenades and leaping flames when you were on top of the chandelier, and retreating back to the floor below was the only route back out of trouble.

Format: SNES, Mega Drive
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Release: 1993



A deft juggling act between the top of the chandelier and the relative safety of the ground was required to succeed, along with some nifty gymnastics to keep out of harm's way. As this fight didn't rely on memorising attack patterns, a diverse amount of tactics could successfully be brought into play – slide along the floor, hang from the chandelier or improvise and rely on reactions? The Smith Brothers encounter was a blueprint for future boss fights if ever we saw one.





GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT...

Princess Tomato In The Salad Kingdom

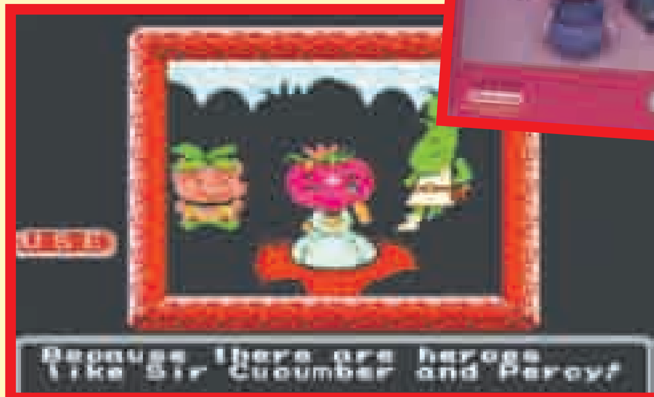
Release: 1988
Format: NES
Publisher: Hudson
Developer: In-House

Don't judge a book by its cover' is a saying often heard when something is condemned solely on first impressions. This appears to be the cruel fate suffered by *Princess Tomato In The Salad Kingdom*, as Hudson Soft's NES curio was ignored on its release in 1988. The name isn't a big hit, but the game doesn't seem appealing when judged on other criteria either; the fights are extended bouts of 'paper, scissors, stone' and you spend much of the game trying to rescue a kidnapped fruit. Delve deeper, however, and it's clear there's more to this than meets the eye.

Princess Tomato is a graphic adventure where you fill the green shoes (or skin? flesh?) of Sir Cucumber. What noble deeds this vegetable has carried out in the past to earn his knighthood is never revealed, but in his immediate future Sir Cucumber has to traverse the Salad Kingdom to save Princess Tomato. No surprises there. You travel from screen to screen and choose what action to take by selecting a command from the side-bars, usually the customary commands 'talk' and 'use' enabling progress, but there are moments that require more peculiar commands, such as 'praise' and 'Percy'.

Percy is a baby persimmon you rescue at the beginning of your adventure and he tags along until the story reaches its conclusion. He has an annoying tendency to lose most of your items – something to do with a persimmon's lack of pockets, we imagine – so he makes up for it by offering advice, finding you items and having various contacts in the vegetable world. It's the only game we can recall where a vegetable's social circle can be used to your advantage, but Percy works well in this context, being sometimes essential to solving puzzles and always useful when you're stuck.

The tone throughout is childish without ever coming across as saccharine or insulting, the gentle, surreal humour appealing beyond its



assumed young audience. Names such as Mister Leek, Grapy and Uncle Peanut mask a game that's unexpectedly complex, with puzzles requiring plenty of exploration.

Sir Cucumber will also get caught up in a few scraps along the way, as not all fruit and vegetables can co-exist peacefully in the Salad Kingdom. As mentioned before, 'paper, scissors, stone' makes up the gloriously twee duelling. If you guess correctly against your opponent you then need to predict which way your opponent will look and point in that direction to secure the round.

The mazes prove a letdown, as the inclusion of essential items within these labyrinths becomes infuriating when you miss them first time round. Likewise, the locations are stretched to breaking point, with too much backtracking and double-checking (sometimes triple-checking) needed. So it's not perfect, but few games are. Instead, *Princess Tomato In The Salad Kingdom* is proof that games that appeal to children don't have to alienate adults – or indeed, children – with over-simplified, patronising gameplay. But that title eh? Absolutely dreadful.

Why Don't They Remake…

WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T LOOK AT HIM FUNNY OR SPILL HIS PINT…

RENEGADE

Release: **1986**
Format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **Taito**
Developer: **In-House**

When gamers thwarted Dr X's plans for world domination in *Streets Of Rage III*, few would have predicted the ensuing slump in side-scrolling beat-'em-ups. In retrospect, SEGA's title wasn't just the swansong for the Mega Drive but for the whole genre – there just seemed to be a lack of cities that needed cleaning up. Even given the power of next-gen consoles, side-scrolling beat-'em-ups have been reluctant to emerge from their hiding place. So why not revisit the game that started it all, Taito's *Renegade*?

Those who are fussy might point out that *Kung-Fu Master* heralded the dawn of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups but *Renegade* shifted the street violence into three dimensions and expanded upon the gameplay. The story saw you chase after your brother who had been kidnapped by Mr Big, though in the US version you fought to rescue your girlfriend from pesky street thugs instead.

The five levels that followed took place in parks, perilous bars and Chinatown areas. Today's consoles would allow for sprawling cities, as the old left-to-right streets of *Renegade* could be remade into dingy alleyways, towering buildings and grimy suburbs. In particular, the original subway could be made into a graphical tour de force complete with a moving train to throw your enemies under. Graphic? Possibly, but nothing to be ashamed of in a post-*Manhunt* world.

Renegade also boasted a number of enemies that stood out for their unique and detailed design; skinheads, gangsters, b-boys, rockers, prostitutes and even dogs. Games have been using similar characters for years, so *Renegade*'s motley crew could easily be updated. The biggest problem *Renegade* would face moving into full 3D would be integrating a slick control system to let you lock onto enemies without confusing the player. Nevertheless, the gameplay should find a home in most gamers' hearts if current trends are anything to go by.

Renegade was considered the faster, grittier alternative to *Double Dragon*, letting you throw enemies into other goons and use some brutal moves. Add the ability to use weapons, which the original sorely lacked, and the cocktail is there for a deserving remake.

Not that *Renegade* has to provide the spark for the genre's renaissance, as it's possible to detect a whiff of a revival in the air. The recently released *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* wasn't a classic by any means but with *Death By Degrees* on the cards and SEGA bringing *Spikeout* to Xbox, the quantity of games spearheading the revival will be almost as important as the quality. That would set the stage for *Renegade*, which could deliver the knockout blow once the initial wave of next-gen side-scrolling beat-'em-ups whets our appetite.



▲ The subway level allowed for some miscreant-on-tracks action. If only they'd painted the yellow lines on the platform edge, he'd be safe now.



▲ Mistaking one of the biker gang for the guy out of the Village People was just asking for trouble…



▲ Brassy, lairy, over-exposed women busting for a scrap in the high street. Welcome to Friday night.

SEGA

NOW, WE'RE OFF TO THE FANTASY ZONE!

SPACE HARRIER



SPACE HARRIER (Arcade) SEGA, 1985 – Original arcade flyer

SEGA MEGA-CD



SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: Motorola 6800
CPU SPEED: 12.5 MHz
GRAPHICS PROCESSOR: Custom ASIC RAM
RESOLUTION: 320x224
COLOUR PALETTE: 512
MEMORY: 6Mbit Main RAM
128 Kbit CD-ROM data cache memory
64 Kbit Internal Backup RAM
MAX COLOURS: 64 (128 by using HAM "Ham & Modify")
AUDIO: PCM Sound Stereo 8 channels
GAME MEDIA: Compact Disc
STORAGE CAPACITY: Approx. 500Mb of data (62 minutes of audio data equivalent)
QUARTER-SCREEN BLACK AND WHITE FOOTAGE VIDEO: 1.5 to 4 hours
QUARTER-SCREEN COLOUR FOOTAGE VIDEO: 45 minutes

The biggest difference between the Mega Drive and Mega CD was the latter's ability to play CDs and Full Motion Video. The music was a great addition, but FMV sequences tended to be grainy and they cheapened many titles.

MANY GAMERS SAW IT AS AN OVERLY EXPENSIVE ADD-ON FOR SEGA'S MEGA DRIVE, BUT THE MEGA CD WASN'T THE WHITE ELEPHANT THAT PEOPLE THOUGHT…

For many, SEGA's Mega CD and 32X enhancements were the portents of doom that announced the beginning of the end of SEGA as a hardware manufacturer. In truth, however, the Mega CD initially sold extremely well outside Europe and proved a popular alternative to NEC's CD-ROM for the PC Engine.

Unveiled at the Tokyo Toy Show in 1991, the Mega CD (or SEGA CD as it was known in the US) sold over 100,000 units in its first year on sale in Japan. Unfortunately, the fact that the Mega CD was useless without a Mega Drive, combined with a high price in the UK (£270), meant that few units were sold over here. It was eventually estimated that fewer than five per cent of Mega Drive owners in Europe bought the add-on.

The biggest benefit of the Mega CD was the amount of storage capacity that the discs boasted; sadly, this proved to be a double-edged sword. While plenty of games were greatly enhanced by the CD-quality sound, many companies used the extra space to experiment with full-motion video (FMV) even though the machine also had 3D capabilities (albeit limited ones) and was able to pull off similar scaling and rotation tricks to the SNES's Mode 7.

Although FMV was fine in theory, the Mega CD's 16-bit palette meant that games featuring FMV looked incredibly grainy and were saddled with horribly simple gameplay. It's no surprise that titles like *Tom Cat Alley*, *Road Avenger*, *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* fared so badly on the machine and can now be found lining the shelves of second-hand shops throughout the UK.

Despite critical and commercial disdain, developers insisted on churning out FMV-heavy titles and the Mega CD's library soon became very stale. By 1993, titles like *Night Trap* were being accused of using excessive violence and many stores began pulling Mega CD titles from their shelves in case they caused further controversy. Indeed, SEGA became the first publisher to give its games ratings, but even this wasn't enough to subdue the uprising against violent games.

With SEGA taking far too long to send out development kits to third-

Classic Machine

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED…

Although it never had as many transformations as NEC's PC Engine, several versions of the Mega CD were released, albeit at different times. The original design (seen in the main picture) was a rather bulky affair and was similar to many CD players of the time. The Mega Drive sat on top of the machine and was connected via an extension interface card.

This model was superseded by a smaller, top-loading-tray design that was cheaper to produce and sat comfortably next to the recently released Mega Drive II. Towards the end of the Mega CD's life, SEGA finally unveiled the CDX, which combined both machines and added the ability to use it as a personal stereo as well.

If all that wasn't enough, the Wondermega was a larger version of the CDX with built-in karaoke features and plenty of audio upgrades. Like the Mega CD, the Wondermega was eventually redesigned. Be warned, though – all versions are very expensive to buy today.



NOT THE PRETTIEST CASES

In an attempt to make the games stand out on the shelves, Mega CD titles came in chunky cases, but the boxes were pretty ugly and felt rather cheap and nasty. Still, better than the PAL Dreamcast cases…

"WHY I LOVE MY SEGA MEGA CD"

I'll never forget how stunned I was when I saw Road Avenger and Night Trap for the first time – I felt like a pioneer at the dawn of a new era. Luckily, I came to my senses and found the Mega CD's 'proper games', and SEGA's brave console will always have a place in my heart.

DARRAN

party developers, a ridiculously high price to consider and the increasing dominance of Nintendo's SNES, it all became too much for SEGA's first CD-based machine and it was eventually discontinued in 1996.

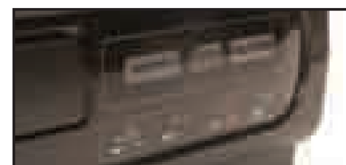
NEARLY 3D

One of the biggest advantages the Mega CD had over its 16-bit brother was the ability to experiment with new and exciting game ideas. As well as taking FMV as far as they could, there were many games that used the machine's sprite scaling and rotation to create enhanced pseudo-3D visuals (think Mode 7, but on a grander scale). Core Design was particularly innovative in this area and released classics like *Thunderhawk* and *Battlecorps* (although the less said about *BC Racers*, the better).



THE PARTY'S OVER

While the Mega CD was technically superior to the Mega Drive, many of its games suffered from lazy programming. Developers quickly realised they could simply release identical games and just add a CD soundtrack to justify the new price tag. There's nothing worse than seeing a machine crippled by third-party support and while there are plenty of classics available, we can't help but wonder what would have happened if the Mega CD was really pushed, both commercially and artistically.



Classic Machine

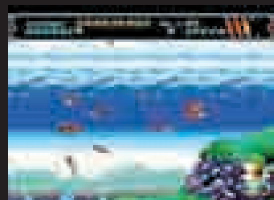
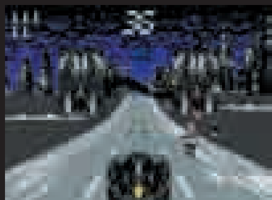
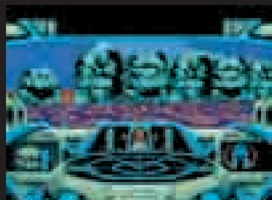
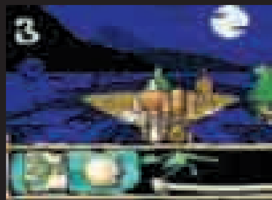
MEGA-CD



READY COMPACT disc ACCESS



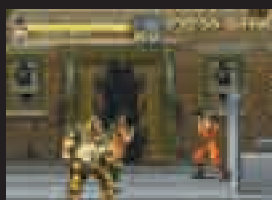


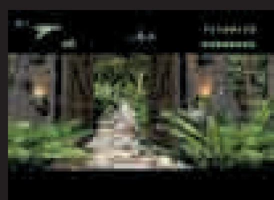
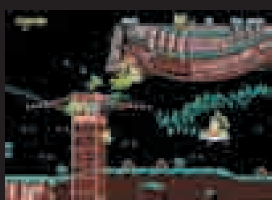






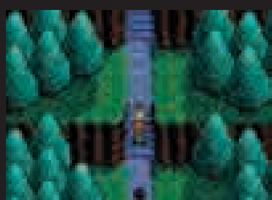
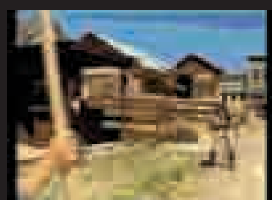
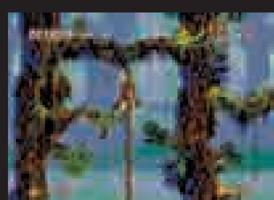


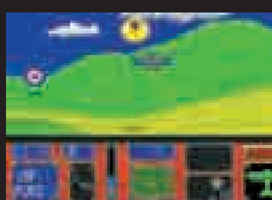


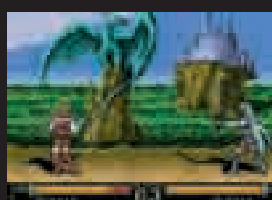
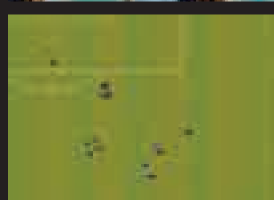
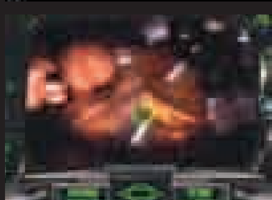
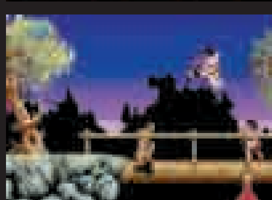
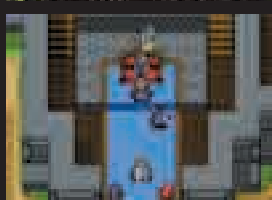
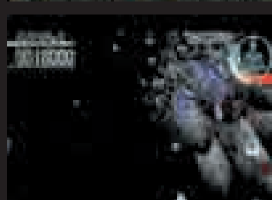


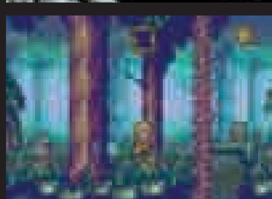
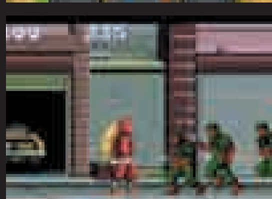
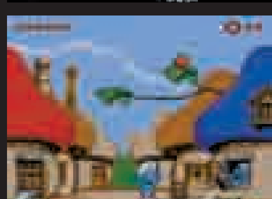
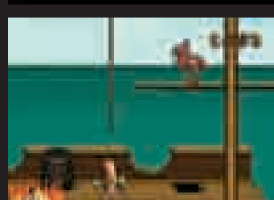
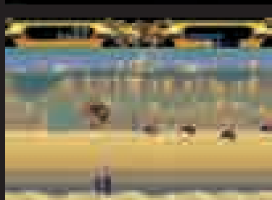
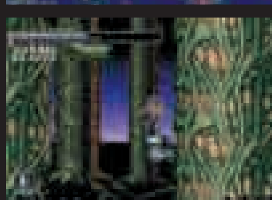
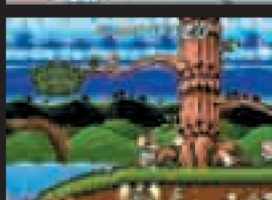






Six of the Best



THE MEGA CD MAY HAVE SUFFERED FROM SOME HORRIBLY GRAINY QUASI-FILM TITLES, BUT IF YOU DUG DEEP ENOUGH YOU COULD FIND A FEW CLASSICS…

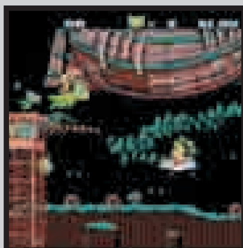
Shining Force CD



Developer: SEGA
Year: 1994

SEGA sneakily incorporated the original two Game Gear *Shining Force* titles into this impressive CD, but there were still enough extras to warrant a second look. Featuring some excellent turn-based gameplay, *Shining Force CD*'s visuals had been vastly updated. Sound was also strong and consisted of a rousing orchestral score. Sadly, it was no longer possible to visit towns (as in previous titles) but with secret characters, additional chapters and the updated aesthetics, it became an essential title for Mega CD owners.

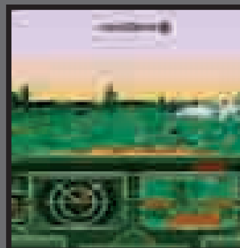
Keio's Flying Squadron



Developer: Victor Interactive Software
Year: 1994

Keio's Flying Squadron is typical of a heavily styled Japanese title that managed to sneak beneath the NTSC barrier and secure itself a PAL release. Taking control of a cute-looking girl in a bunny outfit (well, that's what she looks like to us) you were thrust into a gorgeous-looking 2D shooter that was reminiscent of games like *Parodius*, *Cotton* and *Twin Bee*. Backed up by some jaunty Japanese tunes, *Keio's Flying Squadron* is well worth tracking down. Be warned, though – it had a limited release so can be quite pricey.

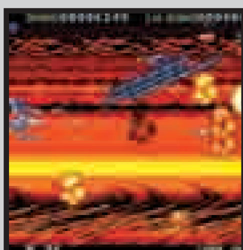
Thunderhawk



Developer: Core Design
Year: 1992

Before it started churning out identikit *Tomb Raider* titles, Core produced some cutting-edge titles for the Mega CD and *Thunderhawk* was arguably the greatest. Thanks to the Mega CD's sprite scaling and rotation effects, players were thrown into a gorgeous 3D blaster that really showed off the potential of the machine. This was quite a tough game (with later levels being particularly tricky), but the fair gameplay and astounding visuals were more than enough to keep you coming back.

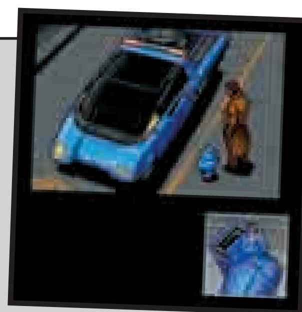
Sol-Feace



Developer: Wolfteam
Year: 1992

Apart from the rocking CD soundtrack and all-new intro, this was identical to the Mega Drive version. Still, as blasters go it was an impressive title filled with some great bosses, frenetic gameplay and some of the best music to grace the Mega CD. What made *Sol-Feace* stand out was the impressive sprite rotation and scaling that featured heavily. Sadly, all the technical wizardry sometimes caused some horrific flicker (which made it hard to avoid bullets) but as out-and-out blasters went, this was one of the best.

Snatcher



Developer: Konami
Year: 1994

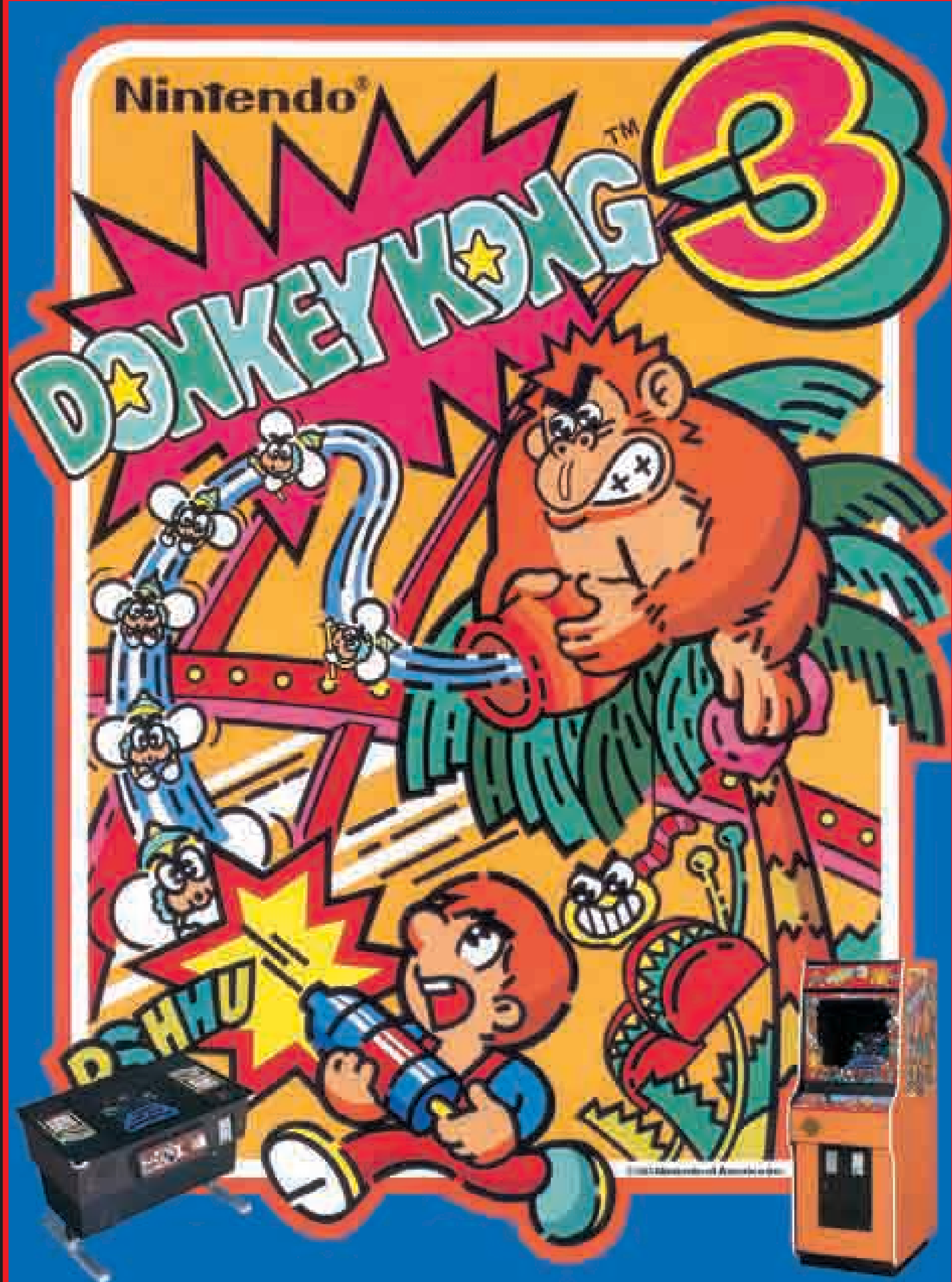
Hideo Kojima may well be synonymous with the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise now, but *Snatcher* is an early title from the master of stealth that's well worth seeking out. Initially appearing on the MSX, Kojima-san's Mega CD version was the only one to get an English translation; the result is a wonderfully scripted story that sets you against evil robots that have taken human forms. While the gameplay is very linear, it's bolstered by an engrossing storyline and some superb voice acting. Despite being fairly easy, *Snatcher* was one of the most atmospheric titles on the system.

Sonic CD

Developer: Sonic Team
Year: 1993

For many, *Sonic CD* is easily the best of Sonic's 2D adventures and is still fantastically playable. Once again facing off against the evil Dr Robotnik, Sonic soon found out that his evil nemesis had created a metallic foe in Sonic's own image. The action that followed was augmented by some nifty graphical trickery and fantastic tunes. Even the cartoon at the beginning of the game was tolerable and perfectly encapsulated the in-game action. Faster, brighter and smoother than ever, for us, Sonic's CD outing has never been bettered.





DONKEY KONG 3 (Arcade) Nintendo, 1983 – Original arcade flyer

The GREATEST Show on Earth

…OR HOW TWO MEN SAVED OUR ARCADE GAMING HERITAGE FROM RUSTING IN A SKIP

Walk into any arcade nowadays and you'll be assaulted by huge mechanical behemoths sporting all manner of bizarre add-ons in an attempt to offer you the latest thrill that can't be delivered at home. Once upon a time, though, things used to be different…

Close your eyes, clear your mind and try to visualise the perfect arcade. Perhaps you're grasping the twin sticks of *Robotron 2084*, or maybe you're just savouring the delicious 'wakka wakka' of Pac-Man as he chases Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde. You may even be imagining the joy of hearing Ben Kenobi ensuring you that 'the Force would be with you always'. Once you've awakened from your reverie, however, you'll realise that those cherished memories are just that – memories that are gone forever. Or are they?

As gamers grew up and acquired disposable incomes, many thought it would be cool to own one of those machines that they always used to play on as a kid. Dom 'Rav' Escott was one such gamer. Spurred on by his love of *R-Type*, Escott would get in his van and travel the country every weekend looking for old arcade machines to add to his collection. Of course, his colleagues thought he was mad but Escott didn't care, and it was his love of arcade games that's helped create one of the most extraordinary and exciting museums we've ever had the pleasure to visit.

Currently based in Bosham, West Sussex, Retrokade is a retro gamer's dream come true and features an astonishing line-up of a hundred vintage arcade games; *Mr Do*, *Space Panic*, *Tempest*, *Gorf*, *Zoo Keeper*, *Pac-Man*, *Defender*, *Rally X* and *Space Invaders* are just a few of the classic titles that you'll find in Retrokade's spacious innards. Indeed, if you're not fortunate enough to be Archer Maclean (Escott sold him his first machine, and the creator of *IK+* now has over 150 machines), it's one of the only ways that you'll ever be able to experience these games properly.

Retrokade started when one of Escott's colleagues suggested that these machines were historical items and needed to be kept for posterity. "I suddenly realised at that point that I was probably one of the only people in Europe who could fulfil those requirements," Escott proudly explains. "That's why Retrokade is here today. Since making the decision to found Retrokade two years ago, we've tripled the number of machines that



▼ No, you're not dreaming. There really is a place that houses all these amazing games. Prepare to abandon the outside world for a few weeks…



Retro Feature



▲ It might look chaotic, but Retrokade's workshop means all the games can be fixed quickly and easily.



▲ Need a spare ROM to fix a faulty board? There's bound to be one around here somewhere…

we own and they're all on display for people all to enjoy in one place."

Knowing that his vision would be too great a burden to manage on his own, Escott teamed up with friend and business associate Andy Welburn of Andy's Arcade. As Escott explains, though, there were plenty of others who gave him the support that was needed to get Retrokade up and running. "First and foremost, I have to mention UK-VAC [UK Video Arcade Collectors' website], which I was a founding member of," Escott says. "They've been an immediate resource and because they all collect their own machines, they've been extremely helpful tracking down those harder-to-find cabinets."

MAGIC

And what machines they are. Rather than collect the generic JAMMA cabs that became so popular in the Nineties, Retrokade prides itself on its beautifully restored dedicated cabinets, a point that Escott feels strongly about. "To us, most of the ambience of an arcade game was the fact that the whole cabinet was designed around the game and it effectively became an extension of the graphics and sound," he says. "When games moved on from that to becoming simple boards that could be replaced, we felt a lot of the magic was lost. Of course, we do have some JAMMA machines and we will regularly change the

RETROKADE Top Ten

With so many games to play and so little time for us to play them, it was impossible to experience everything that Retrokade had to offer. But these are just a few of our favourites…

1 ROBOTRON 2084: If you've only ever experienced Eugene Jarvis' classic on MAME, it's quite daunting to finally stand in front of the machine's dual joysticks and start playing. Before long though, the sticks become natural extensions of your arms and you'll soon be blasting the game's myriad enemies to hell.

2 ZOO KEEPER: Extremely rare, Retrokade's *Zoo Keeper* is in fantastic condition and proves that it's not always the most well-known titles that make the best games. Taking on the role of the titular Zoo Keeper, you almost continually run around brick enclosures and stop the many animals from escaping. Great stuff.

3 OUTRUN: It might not be as old as some of the machines on offer, but there was no way we were going to leave without first listening to the fantastic *Magical Sound Shower*. Still blindingly fast and drop-dead gorgeous to boot, *OutRun* remains an absolute classic.

4 I, ROBOT: After last month's feature, the opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the ground-breaking *I, Robot* was too good an opportunity to miss. Indeed, it's easy to forget just how addictive this game is – if it weren't for the fact that we were on a schedule, we'd have stayed on it all day.

5 DISCS OF TRON: It takes a while to get used to the seat, but once you're in the *Discs Of Tron* cab and avoiding your enemy's Frisbees, it becomes difficult to leave. Fiendishly tricky and horribly addictive, this Bally Midway title is one of the first games that you should visit.

6 GALAXIAN: Retrokade obviously has *Space Invaders* on display, but there's something about *Galaxian* that enthrals us to this day. We don't know whether it's the great visuals or the dive-bombing opponents, but we found it extremely difficult to stop putting credits in.

7 QIX: Like many classics of yesteryear, *Qix's* gameplay is simple, but horribly effective. Simply draw boxes to reclaim as much of the screen as possible, whilst avoiding the deadly Qix and Sparx. Later variations of the game involved uncovering pictures (mostly of naked women).

8 PAC-MAN: When you see a machine as nice as *Pac-Man*, it's impossible to not stop and put a few credits in it. Unsurprisingly, the gameplay is as fresh as ever and recent releases like *Pac-Man Versus* continue to prove that the pill muncher's days are far from over.

9 MAJOR HAVOC: Escott explained that the main reason for a recent trip to Retrokade by Jeff Minter was so that he could play Atari's classic (and now very rare) blaster. Featuring some superb vector graphics even the briefest of plays will soon make you as much a fan as Minter is.

10 R-TYPE: Considering this is Escott's favourite game, there was no way we couldn't include it. *R-Type* is still one of the best examples of the horizontal shooter that you'll find. Gorgeous to look at and with great level design, we only left the machine when Escott challenged us to a game.



▲ The cabinet on the left is *Computer Space* – created in 1971, it was the world's first arcade machine. Up yours, *Pong*.



▲ Glorious original cabinets as far as the eye can see – it's enough to make the hardest retro heart melt.

games over – we even let members bring their own boards down."

Escott is attempting to raise awareness of Retrokade so that it can be considered a proper museum, and while current members do have to pay a small fee to come in and play the machines, it's the ability to share his passion with others that's proved to be Escott's main motivation. "One of the nice things about Retrokade is seeing people remember the games that they've long since forgotten," he says. "People may walk past a game and initially ignore it; once they start playing it, though, you can see it all coming back to them and that's what makes it so fantastic. It's great to see people wandering about and reliving past memories and that's what helps Retrokade remain unique." That's a good point – after all, we can't think of anywhere that allows you to play authentic versions of *Stun Runner*, *Rolling Thunder*, *Burger Time*, *Tapper*, *Star Wars* and *Donkey Kong* in just one afternoon.

SAVED

One of the real highlights of Retrokade is the sheer joy of seeing all those lovingly restored original cabs. "We've concentrated on the original, dedicated arcade games, where the purpose of the machine's artwork, attraction panels and marquees was to help attract more people to them," Escott reveals. "As far as we're concerned, these machines are a form of art that should be preserved. So many of them get smashed, converted into something else or simply left to rot and it's heartbreaking to think of this happening. We think they should be preserved and saved for future generations; after all, every game that's ever been written has its roots in an arcade machine and these games should be readily available for people to enjoy."

By far the most impressive element of Retrokade is one that most visitors will never experience, and that's the switching on of the machines. You're suddenly assaulted by a cacophony of familiar tunes and it's amazing how quickly you'll instantly recall treasured memories just by hearing the attract screens of games like *Star Wars*, *Gyruss*, *Donkey Kong Jr* and *Carnival*. Using original cabs has really paid off and while it may be expensive, the results have definitely been worth it.

"We've gone to great pains and expense to have the original, dedicated machines and we now have cabs coming from Germany, Holland and America," says Escott. "Of course, a large amount of our cabinets have come from the UK,



▲ It's all very well using MAME, but you'll never get the true playing experience. Come on – how are you meant to emulate that joystick?

NOT ALL THERE...

With so many historic games on display, you'd think that you've finally found gaming nirvana, but even Escott admits that improvements can still be made to Retrokade's impressive line-up. "While we now feel that we've covered most bases and have gone to great lengths to ensure that all the classics are here, there are still a few which are currently missing," he laments. "We have a lot of requests for *Afterburner* and *Commando* and it would be nice to be able to feature games like *Mad Dog McCree*. Our most glaring omission, however, is *1942*, but due to our preference for dedicated cabs, we haven't included it just yet."

but due to the damp environment, a lot of the machines we receive have broken down. Many of the machines here are also very old and cranky and it's not unusual to have to replace one while we fix it."

FIXED

Despite the age of many of the machines, they're a lot sturdier than you might think. "Once a machine is in a good, heated environment, it's normally fine," Escott explains. "Machines don't like the cold, they hate to get wet and they can't stand being moved. About 30 games alone broke down when we moved here; fortunately, most problems were trivial like loose wires. Once they're in place, though, they're pretty reliable. However, due to their extreme age – games like *Computer Space* are now over 30 years old – we make sure that we have spares for every single machine." While obtaining duplicates can be extremely expensive, it's a gamble that's paid off handsomely and, as a result, visitors are pretty much guaranteed a full working assortment of games.

While the occasional broken machine can be annoying, the main worry at Retrokade is that people won't take the enterprise seriously. "The main purpose of Retrokade's existence is to preserve arcade machines and make people realise that they are an important part of gaming's history," Escott says. "No official entity is keeping these machines for prosperity and we're actually trying to make Retrokade a preservation society. We want to create a working museum where people can come and experience true gameplay and some classic games. As people get older and more important priorities fill their lives, they are finding themselves with less and less time to play games. Hopefully Retrokade will be able to fill that gap." We certainly think it's doing a pretty good job…

Andy Welburn

Q. What's your role at Retrokade?
I get to do all the really nasty circuit-level repairs. I'm also a lot more adventurous at working on live monitors, so I get that job too.

Q. How hard is it to find spare parts?
While original parts are increasingly hard to find, reproduction parts are becoming much more commonplace. The problem is that very few reproduction parts actually match the quality of the real thing. While they might 'look' the same they often lack the same properties as the originals, and cause problems you wouldn't expect to run into if you had the real thing.

Q. Which machines break down the most?
Vector monitor-based games have a bad reputation for being very unreliable, but we haven't really experienced this. We have much less exotic machines that fail for no real reason. I would say a particular genre that causes problems time and time again is Midway MCR games – *Tron*, *Discs Of Tron*, *Tapper* and *SpyHunter*. The system is really hard to work on, and the cabinet design is really bad. The paperwork is also inaccurately labelled in a lot of places, which makes wiring harnesses, plugs and connectors a joy to work on.

Q. Are any machines particularly difficult to fix?
Midway MCR games again… MCR1 PCBs (*Gorf*, *Wizard Of Wor*) are almost impossible to work on as they have to sit inside a cage. MCR2 (*Tron*) and MCR3 (*Tapper*, *Discs Of Tron*, *SpyHunter*) are just hard to work on – they fold out into a long set of PCBs with horribly delicate board interconnections which are, at best, fragile. Couple that with the fact that the hardware has few customs circuits, which means that my test equipment is restricted to testing only a few basic sections of the game board.



Q. Got any horror stories to tell us?
I think the most worrying thing about the whole place is the smell of burning. You have to have nasal radar installed and active the whole time. As soon as you get the faintest whiff of something roasting, you run around the place sniffing the machines and looking for smoke. Fortunately, it hasn't happened too often over the years. We have powder extinguishers strategically located on each row so there is little chance of an actual fire.

Q. Why go to so much trouble to recreate a 30-year old machine?
Why not? The modern 'simulations' or emulators just don't cut it. The TTL-based games (purely logic ICs, no CPU) cannot be emulated, so they are unique – there is no way you can know what they were like without playing the real thing. Another reason is for the artwork and the cabinet – a hell of a lot of games just cannot be played as they were intended without the accompanying cabinet peripherals, artwork and additional lighting.

"We want to create a working museum where people can experience true gameplay"

IMPORTANT NEWS: As we went to press we discovered that due to circumstances beyond its control, Retrokade is having to move from its current location and is therefore temporarily closed. Nevertheless, Escott is confident that this will only be a minor setback, and as soon as the situation changes we'll let you know. For more up-to-date information, visit Retrokade's website at www.retrokade.co.uk

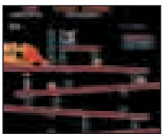
DONKEY KONG

Family Tree

After debuting as a girlfriend-stealing ape, Donkey Kong has gone on to star in numerous games. Clearly not shy of the spotlight, Donkey Kong had made cameo appearances in dozens of Nintendo titles, many of which we didn't have room for here. Most of the time you need to look really hard, but perseverance does pay off. *Punch-Out*, *Super Punch-Out*, *Tetris*, *F1-Race*, *NES Open Tournament Golf*, *Mario's Time Machine*, the Game Boy Camera, *Super Mario RPG* and *Mario Tennis* on the Game Boy Color are just a few of the monkey's star moments.

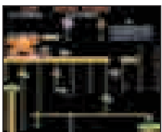
Now as well known as his original nemesis, Mario, the celebrity simian's Family Tree is long overdue…

DONKEY KONG



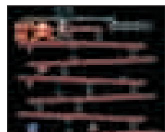
- 1981
- Arcade
- When Nintendo's *Radar Scope* was a flop, Miyamoto-san was asked to create a new game. The result was this classic, which established Nintendo as a firm to watch. With simple but addictive gameplay, this title saw DK's debut.

DONKEY KONG JR ARCADE



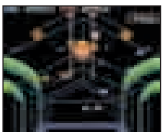
- 1982
- Arcade
- *Donkey Kong Jr* saw the tables turn as the eponymous hero rescued his dad from the clutches of Mario. With four distinctive levels – The Vines, The Chains, The Jumpboard and The Hideout – this was just as enjoyable as *Donkey Kong*.

DONKEY KONG CLASSICS NES



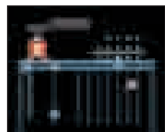
- 1982
- Famicom
- Cashing in on DK's success, Nintendo released *Donkey Kong Classics*, a rehash of *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr*. Although it was just an amalgamation, fans loved it. An arcade version – *Double Donkey Kong* – was also released.

DONKEY KONG 3



- 1983
- Arcade
- Nintendo released the third *DK* game in as many years in 1983. Stanley replaced Mario and you had to shoot DK with insect repellent while guarding five plants at the bottom of the screen. Fun, but not in the same league as the previous games.

DONKEY KONG JR MATH



- 1983
- Famicom
- *Donkey Kong Jr Math* was a real disappointment. Although there were three gameplay modes in this number-based edutainment title, they were all very simplistic and dull. Fortunately, Donkey Kong Jr never went to school again.

HANDHELD

DONKEY KONG



- 1994
- Game Boy
- It was inevitable that DK would appear on the Game Boy after his SNES success. The first four levels were identical to the original arcade game, but there were plenty of new ones too. Mario had new abilities, but they spoilt the gameplay a bit.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 1994
- SNES
- Created by Rare and featuring some of the most gorgeous visuals SNES owners had ever seen, this scrolling platformer felt incredibly fresh and proved there was life in the old ape yet. DK was the hero as he set out to find his stash of bananas.

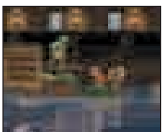
RARE CONNECTION

DONKEY KONG LAND



- 1995
- Game Boy
- There was no denying that Rare had created an extremely close conversion of its SNES hit, although it was obviously scaled down. While the visuals took a hit, all the gameplay from the SNES version had been captured perfectly.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY KONG'S QUEST



- 1995
- SNES
- *Diddy Kong's Quest* was the superb follow-up to Rare's smash hit and added new twists to the gameplay. With Donkey Kong captured, it was up to Diddy and Dixie Kong to save him, and you were able to turn into various animals.

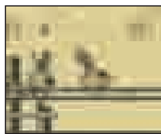
SUPER MARIO KART



- 1992
- SNES
- After starring in so many of his own games, Donkey Kong took a back seat (pun intended) and joined Mario and friends on the racetrack. Due to his bulk, DK proved to be better suited to more experienced Karters and handled rather like Bowser.

GUEST STAR

DONKEY KONG LAND 2: DIDDY KONG'S QUEST

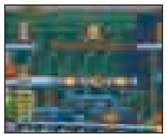


- 1996
- Game Boy
- Sadly, Rare's second Game Boy title failed to match the previous game. The biggest problem was that a key move from the SNES version – the great throwing system – had been dropped. The game was visually impressive, though.

DK COUNTRY 3: DIXIE KONG'S DOUBLE TROUBLE

- 1996
- SNES
- The last *Donkey Kong Country* game saw Dixie and Kiddie Kong saving Diddy and Donkey Kong. This title featured lots of mini-games and a few RPG elements. With visuals to die for, *DKC3* was one of the last big titles for Nintendo's dying machine.

GAME AND WATCH GALLERY SERIES



- 1997-2002
- GBC, GBA
- Starting with the second *Gallery* game, Donkey Kong immediately became a key character in the series. All the games here were perfect replicas of the original titles and included special re-creations as well. A great way to see some classics.

DONKEY KONG LAND 3

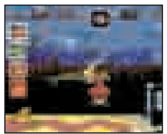


- 1997
- Game Boy
- Despite having fewer RPG elements, Rare's third Game Boy title was a faithful version of the developer's last SNES game. The visuals still looked highly impressive and it was a welcome return to form after *Donkey Kong Land 2*.

DONKEY KONG 64

- 1999
- N64
- Rare went to town with its next Kong platformer, which was so big it had to use the N64's expansion pack. With a funky theme tune and five controllable Kongs, *DK64* also contained versions of the original *Donkey Kong* and Rare's *Jet Pak*.

MARIO KART: SUPER CIRCUIT

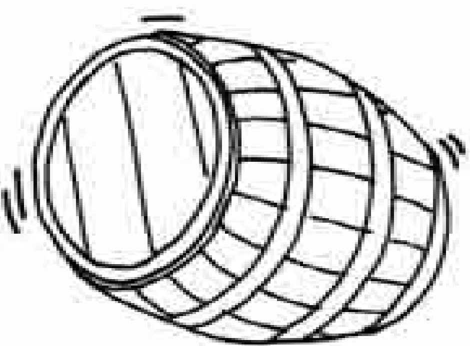


- 2001
- GBA
- The lure of karting was too much for our favourite ape and he hit the tarmac once again in 2001. Created by the excellent Intelligent Systems and featuring all the SNES tracks as a hidden bonus, *Super Circuit* made for a great handheld experience.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 2000
- Game Boy Color
- Another re-jig of the SNES hit, but this time the results were much closer to the original. Rare found time to add extra levels and a few enjoyable mini-games. Definitely worth playing, if only to see the improvements over *Donkey Kong Land*.



MARIO VS DONKEY KONG



- 2004
- GBA
- Donkey Kong is the bad guy again and Mario must travel through six huge worlds to retrieve the mini-Marios that the giant ape has stolen. With a combination of puzzle and platform action, *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* already sounds very promising.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 2003
- GBA
- Hoping to make a quick buck, Nintendo re-released its SNES classic and added a few extra mini-games. Sadly, the visuals were nowhere near as impressive as before and even the gameplay seemed to have suffered in the translation.

DK: KING OF SWING



- 2004
- GBA
- *DK: King Of Swing* will use an innovative new control system that lets Donkey Kong swing through the jungle using the GBA's shoulder buttons. Like *Mario Vs Donkey Kong*, this one looks like it's going to have quite a few puzzles in it.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

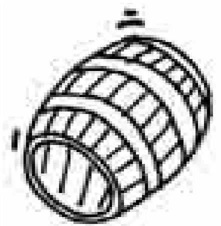


- 2004
- GBA
- Early code suggests that Donkey Kong's second *Country* outing will be similar to the first. The visuals seem to have improved, and fans of the series will be pleased to hear that two new mini-games will also be included.

MARIO KART DS

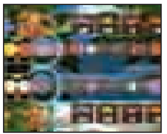


- 2005
- Nintendo DS
- Nintendo is remaining incredibly tight-lipped about its first batch of DS titles, and apart from a few screenshots nothing is known about the gameplay of this title. Let's just hope that this game is as innovative as the machine it's appearing on…



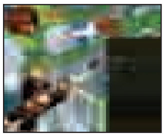
OFFBEAT

DONKEY KONGA



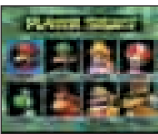
- 2003
- GameCube
- Always willing to try something new, Donkey Kong's recent outing was a rhythm action game that used special bongos to bang out tunes. Brilliant fun (if a little easy), it will be receiving a new music list for its European release later this year.

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT

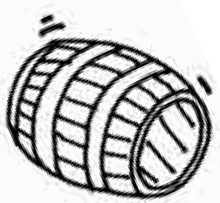


- 2005
- GameCube
- It's safe to say that we're not too sure about Nintendo's next bongo game. You control Donkey Kong by banging the drum to make him move or punch. If you clap, the game then zooms in *Viewtiful Joe*-style and you can dish out even more damage.

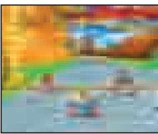
MARIO KART 64



- 1996
- N64
- Although it would be three more years before he featured in his own game again, Donkey Kong was happy to show his gaming versatility. After proving a popular character in *Super Mario Kart*, DK was behind the wheel again for the N64 sequel.

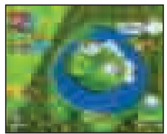


DIDDY KONG RACING



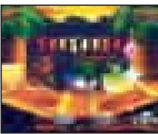
- 1997
- N64
- Although Kong himself was nowhere to be seen, Diddy Kong proved that he was just as good when it came to racing karts. With a superb adventure mode that took ages to complete, *Diddy Kong Racing* was another hit from Rare.

MARIO GOLF



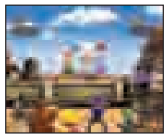
- 1999
- N64
- Keen to prove there was more to him than just hanging around platforms and driving karts, DK showed he could play a decent game of golf. His size meant he was perfect for taking long, powerful shots, though often at the expense of accuracy.

SUPER SMASH BROTHERS



- 1999
- N64
- Pitting some of Nintendo's well-loved characters against each other, *Super Smash Brothers* was an immensely enjoyable brawler. Donkey Kong had a nice range of moves and could cause serious damage in the hands of a pro.

MARIO PARTY SERIES



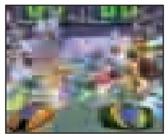
- 1999-present
- N64, Cube
- The *Mario Party* franchise has had varying degrees of success. Nintendo updates each iteration with new mini-games and characters but, for us, the third and fifth games are the best as they pushed the series in new directions.

MARIO TENNIS



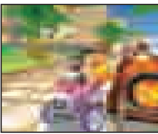
- 2000
- N64
- The lure of a good sports game was always tough for Donkey Kong to resist so he joined Mario and Luigi on the tennis courts. The big ape could pull off some very impressive shots and was a tough adversary. A Cube version is due next year.

SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE



- 2002
- GameCube
- With more combatants and polygons than ever before, *Super Smash Bros. Melee* offered a similar experience to the N64 version. While there were plenty of additional features, we couldn't help but feel a little disappointed.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!



- 2003
- GameCube
- Now that each Kart could carry two players, it was finally possible to create the ultimate monkey duo. The combination of Diddy Kong's speed and Donkey Kong's handling meant the furry pair were extremely tough to beat.

MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR



- 2003
- GameCube
- Donkey and Diddy teamed up again for the Cube version of *Mario Golf* and proved to be perfect partners. While the putting was sometimes tricky, the comedy value of watching Diddy and Donkey swing their clubs was immense.

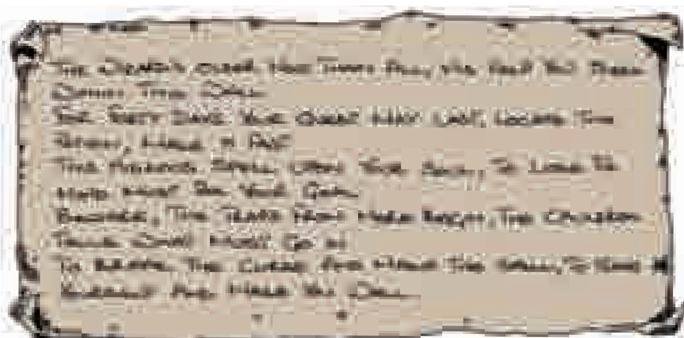
Knight Lore

WE REDISCOVER ULTIMATE'S ISOMETRIC WONDER. COULD SOMEONE PASS THE WOLF'S BANE?

Format: Multiformat
Release: 1984
Publisher: Ultimate
Developer: In-House

One of the great aspects of retro gaming is being able to look back at those titles that helped revolutionise (or even create) whole new genres. Ultimate's superb *Knight Lore* is one such game. Back in the early days of the Spectrum, gamers were more than happy with the quaint, often basic, yet functional visuals of the many titles that were available. While *Knight Lore* wasn't the first isometric game – that honour is held by Sandy White's *Ant Attack* – it was the first to really showcase the technology and helped usher in a whole new genre of gaming.

The third game to feature Sabreman (after *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde*), *Knight Lore*'s story – which was beautifully explained through the inlay card's cryptic poems – saw you travelling to the wizard Melkhior's castle in order to lift a deadly curse that had been placed on you. It transpires that Sabreman has lycanthropic blood in his veins and every night, the poor fellow finds himself transforming into a fearsome werewolf (or should that be werewulf?). Arriving at Melkhior's castle, you soon realised that your task of finding the 14 ingredients needed to lift your curse was going to be far from simple.

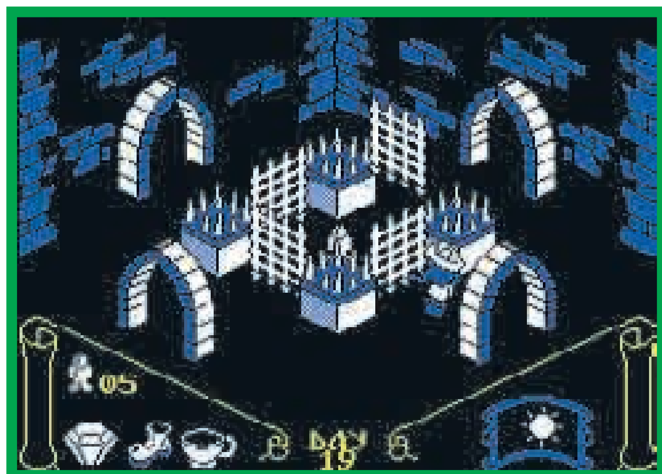


Practically every room you encountered was its own little puzzle that needed to be solved in order to progress and find the elusive wizard and his Alchemist's Pot. To make matters worse, you'd constantly find yourself transmogrifying between a man and a wolf due to the game constantly keeping track of time. If your quest wasn't completed within the required 40 days and 40 nights, Sabreman would be cursed to live as a werewolf forever…

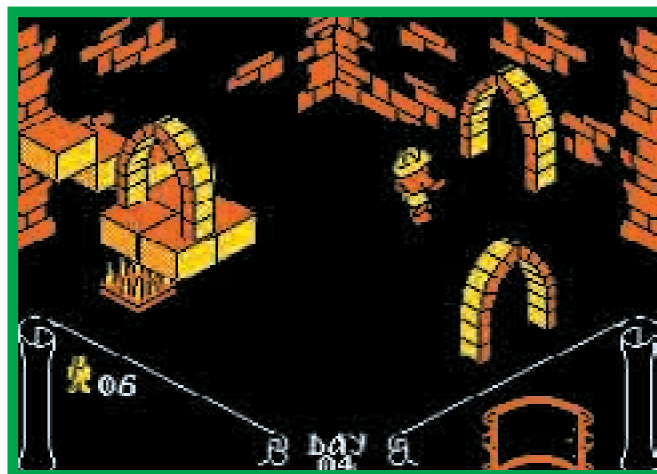
Needless to say, Melkhior's dwelling was absolutely massive and required plenty of exploration in order to find the many objects that were needed to restore your true form. Death awaited you around practically every corner and many rooms were filled with dangerous objects that would cause instant death, should you be unlucky enough to come into contact with them. Ghosts, guards and flames were just a few of the moving hazards you had to negotiate, but it was always *Knight Lore*'s fiendish puzzles and static traps that caused the most headaches.

This was in part due to the game's isometric nature (it was initially very difficult to get to grips with) but special mention also needs to go to *Knight Lore*'s wonderful level design and the Stamper brothers' devious minds. Using a new concept that Ultimate dubbed 'Filmation', *Knight Lore* enabled you to interact with every one of the game's many objects. Of course, this was far different from the interaction we take for granted in today's games, but it was still an incredibly important advance for the Spectrum and gaming in general.

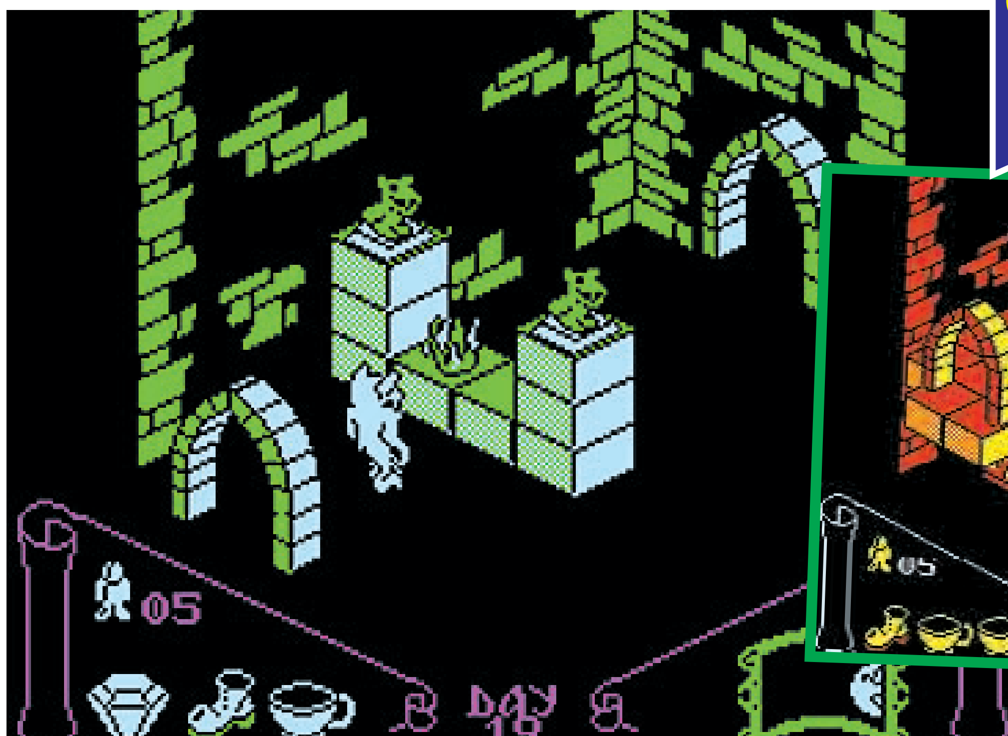
What really made *Knight Lore* stand head and shoulders above its



▲ Check out the ground-breaking 3D graphics. Where were you when *Knight Lore* was released?



▲ Don't worry about the missing bricks and floating doorways – just use your imagination or something.





▲ Forty days and nights to lift Sabreman's curse – but is that working days, or does it include weekends? And what about bank holidays…?

THE AGES OF SABREMAN

Sabreman's first adventure was a satisfying romp that still holds up today. Finding the four pieces of a shattered amulet was no mean feat, but was easy compared to Sabreman's next exploit. *Underwurlde* continued the 2D theme, but saw our intrepid explorer going up against the devil himself. *Knight Lore* appeared third, with *Pentagram* following. The latter was a disappointment, mainly because it was so formulaic – still, at least it was released, which is more than we can say for the mythical *Mire Mare*. Sabreman had a cameo in *Banjo Tooie*, but his recent GBA outing was, sadly, a major letdown.



peers, though, was the astounding new graphics engine that Ultimate had created. As important as *Ant Attack* was, Ultimate had upped the ante considerably and delivered a game quite unlike anything else that had been seen before. The ability to actually hide behind objects brought a whole new dimension to the gameplay and reiterated the fact that Ultimate was a software house to keep a keen eye on.

While each room was rather discreetly coloured, great animation and *Knight Lore*'s distinctive look helped make the game appear even more lifelike and vibrant than it actually was (no mean task in 1984). Detail throughout Ultimate's creation was superb and every little nuance of each character was perfectly captured.

Such was *Knight Lore*'s success, Ultimate used the engine several times, most notably with *Alien 8* and *Gun Fright*. Other companies were also quick to cash in on Ultimate's vision and before long it seemed that every other 8-bit title featured heavy doses of isometric 3D. *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* were just a few of the examples that achieved their own (well-deserved) success and even today, isometric viewpoints are still commonly used.

Perhaps the most surprising fact about *Knight Lore* is that it was actually finished before *Sabre Wulf*. The Stamper brothers felt that the game was too advanced and were also worried that the release of *Knight Lore* (as well as *Alien 8*, which was half completed) would compromise sales of the two-dimensional *Sabre Wulf*, which still hadn't been finished. As a result, *Knight Lore* was delayed until *Sabre Wulf* was completed and eventually became Sabreman's third outing instead of his first. The thought of seeing Sabreman's isometric adventure a full year before his actual debut makes the mind boggle and just goes to show Ultimate's talent and astute awareness of the market.

Regardless of when *Knight Lore* appeared, it managed to capture the imagination of gamers and developers alike, and as with many of Ultimate's early titles it remains incredibly playable today – even if it is bloody hard.

Presentation: **90%**
Even the lavish inlay card let you know you were in for a treat

Graphics **98%**
Breathtaking – Ultimate revolutionised Spectrum gaming

Sound **78%**
Not the game's strong point, but the visuals made up for it

Gameplay **96%**
Filmation let Ultimate break gameplay boundaries

Lifespan **95%**
The game was huge – it took ages to explore the massive castle

OVERALL **95%**

ROM SERVICE

EACH MONTH, GAMES™ TAKES A LOOK AT THE CURRENT STATE OF THE EMULATION SCENE. THIS MONTH, WE LOOK INTO WHY EMULATION COULD WELL BE A GODSEND FOR COLLECTORS A FEW YEARS DOWN THE LINE…

In today's age of high-tech wizardry and cameras the size of a pinhead, nothing can last forever. From the shockingly fallible PlayStation hardware to the weary strains and garbled display of an ageing cartridge, none of our favourite gaming systems are entirely safe. What hope, then, for the Class of '85 and, indeed, all older systems that didn't have the benefit of the security and precautions we enjoy today?

It's a simple fact that, in general, the older the technology, the more fragile it's likely to be and the more care must be taken of it. Images of PCB collectors scurrying around in dimly lit airtight vaults surrounded by bubble-wrapped classics of yesteryear is the best visual representation of this, but thanks to a legal minefield of micro-technology and emulation, there is a safety precaution far more versatile than an untold number of plastic air pockets.

Suffice to say that replacement parts for old machines, boards, consoles or cartridges are not easy to obtain (even within a console's active life), but thanks to the potential of back-up ROM images, waning technology can be brought back from the brink with the right equipment and a little know-how (or help from someone who has either – such sites already exist on the web and this is likely to be the start of something bigger).

Blank chips are now freely available for next to nothing and especially with things like arcade boards, it's not overly difficult for someone with experience to pinpoint a component that refuses to function. From there, it's a case of isolating the particular part of the ROM that represents the damaged part and replacing or repairing it with code burnt from the saved ROM image, theoretically restoring it to good working order once more. Thus a vintage treasure can be saved thanks to what many proclaim to be glorified theft. Oh, the irony.

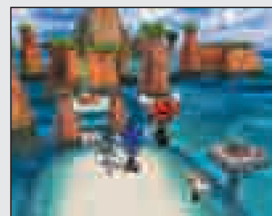
Of course, this is no digital cure-all – merely a luxury of modern society that could ease the woes of a troubled collector. But as the age of your old VHS videos can be estimated by counting the lines that rudely interrupt the picture, many old console games can be dated by how many times you need to blow into the cartridge before they actually work. Similarly, just as VHS is being superseded by DVD at an alarming rate as the older format begins to become not only obsolete but unusable, so too must gaming follow suit.

Whether this means a mass influx of compilation packs like Midway's *Arcade Treasures* and *Sonic Mega Collection* or a digital future where emulation is legal remains to be seen, but as with the hullabaloo surrounding MP3 technology, this is one technical hot potato that's being thrown around faster than you might think – or, more worryingly, almost faster than we can keep up with.

GOOD OUT OF EVIL

Preservation isn't the only way in which emulation can benefit gamers and the industry. There's always the argument that playing an old game like, say, *Sonic 2* on the Mega Drive might make you realise how much you love the spiky blue speedster and cause you to pick up *Sonic Heroes* on a whim. Slightly more weighty is the use of emulation by developers – closer inspection reveals many retro compilation packs to be running what are basically legal emulators.

Dig deeper and you'll get to the really meaty news, like Sony hiring a team of emulation experts to work on forthcoming projects. Whether this is the PSP, the PS3 or perhaps both is a closely guarded secret but that leaves us free to do a lot of speculation. Full backward-compatibility for PS3? PSone emulation on the PSP? Some way of emulating both new systems? Whatever it is, we're sure it won't remain secret for very long.





▲ Is it possible to coax these beauties back to life with a ROM? Perhaps…



▼ No need to send old games to the knacker's yard thanks to ROMs.

Star★games

The games that made it big on TV and at the movies

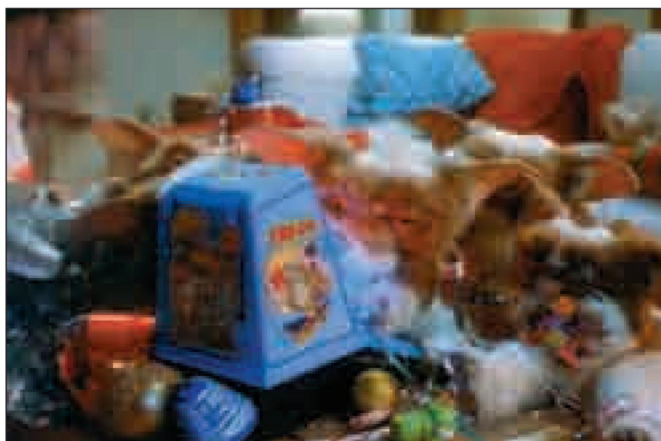
GREMLINS

GIZMO AND PALS SHOW OFF THEIR GAMING PROWESS

There are some things that we all know about Mogwai – like not getting them wet or feeding them after midnight – but how many people can say they knew about the furry critters' gaming ability? If you don't believe us, check out the scene when our hero Billy explains to his dad that spilling water on a Mogwai makes it multiply.

Cut back to Billy's bedroom and the tiny scamps (Gizmo not included) are hammering away at a tabletop version of *Donkey Kong* like seasoned pros. Indeed, they're so in the zone that they totally ignore the bemused father who can't believe his eyes (and is no doubt hatching a 'Mogwai – just add water' plan).

Once the Gremlins arrive on the scene, the gaming continues with one creature in particular proving to be a dab hand at the arcade version of *Star Wars*. While his associates are causing all sorts of trouble in Dorey's Tavern, the green-skinned monster is tearing down the Deathstar trench like a Jedi master. Unfortunately, his game gets disrupted when a ruckus breaks out, but for a foot-high, malevolent beastie he didn't do too bad…



▲ Before you implode in paroxysms of cute-induced joy at the sight of those adorable Mogwai, admire the fine tooling of the *Donkey Kong* game and enjoy your own memories of the big monkey. Okay, now you can implode.





▼ Fed up with wreaking havoc? Kick back with *Star Wars* for a few minutes…

GAME ON…

GET INTO THE UK CLASSIC GAMING EXPO FOR FREE

If you've had enough of reading about retro games and want to go hands-on instead, you'll want to check out the UK's first Classic Gaming Expo. Taking place on 24-25 July at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, as it looks like the perfect way to spend a summer weekend. The event will feature plenty of exhibitors and famous retro faces, as well as a huge amount of classic games to play.

The expo will be opened by the Oliver twins (of *Dizzy* fame) and you'll be able to meet them and maybe even get some cassettes signed. There will also be plenty of original arcade machines, computers and consoles to play on and you'll even get the chance to drive a Sinclair C5.

Perhaps the highlight of the show, though, will be the unveiling of the production discs of *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman* (the unreleased, final part of the *Manic Miner/Jet Set Willy* trilogy). Four films will be shown to tie in with the event, so if the gaming gets too much you can relax and watch *Tomb Raider*, *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, *War Games* and *Tron* on the big screen.

Tickets for each day cost £7.50 for adults and £5.00 for children, and you can buy your Sunday ticket for just £2.50 if you show Saturday's ticket. Now that's what we call a bargain.

SPECIAL OFFER

If that all sounds good to you, we've got a special offer thanks to show organiser Chris Millard. The first 20 **games™** readers to take along this issue of the magazine will receive free entry to the show (no photocopies allowed, one ticket per magazine). Get down there quick, because those free tickets will disappear fast. And thank that nice Mr Millard, too.

Find a clock, turn it back, then play some old games and review them by today's standards. That's what we've done with three classic titles, but have they withstood the passage of time?



Format: PC Engine
Publisher: Naxat/Red
Developer: Naxat/Red
Release: 1990
Price: £45

For those that can afford it, NEC's PC Engine has proved to be an incredibly powerful little console and is rapidly becoming the machine of choice for many people in the office. While normally the home of frantic shoot-'em-ups and cutesy platformers, there's still plenty of diversity on the machine and Naxat's *Devil Crash* is a typical example of the PC Engine at its very best. While pinball may not sound like the ideal candidate for a console game, Naxat has plenty of experience in the genre and previously wowed PC Engine owners with the excellent *Alien Crush*. Dispensing with the alien theme that was so predominant in the last game, *Devil Crash* features an even bigger table that's chock-full of fantastic gothic style and hordes of undead opponents. Skulls, knights, chanting monks and skeletons are just a few of the hazards you must negotiate and there are plenty of bonuses to pick up as you're dispatching your many foes. *Devil Crash* has even more sub-tables than *Alien Crush* and some are fiendishly tricky to complete. Although the majority of the visuals are static, they are painstakingly detailed and are further enhanced by the rocking soundtrack that plays in the background. It's an excellent



MARTIN ***Devil Crash*** **really is one of the most playable and interesting pinball games we've ever seen. While most similar titles have stuck to the realms of realism, *Devil Crash*'s sub-tables are bringing something new to the genre that we've not really experienced before, and these are a great incentive to keep playing. Combine them with some brilliant design, a multi-tiered main table and some of the best music we've heard in a pinball title, and you've got a game that will keep your fingers busy for ages.**



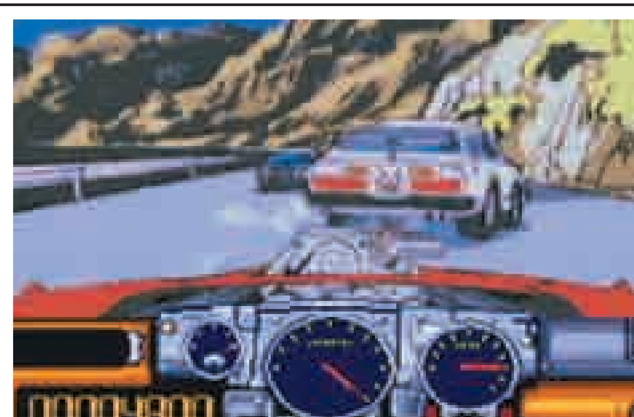
Format: Mega CD
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Wolfteam
Release: 1993
Price: £40

No, no, no. Please, SEGA, stop allowing developers to release FMV games for the Mega CD. They're not big or clever – in fact, most of the ones we've played have been bloody awful. *Road Avenger* is yet another poor attempt to hang a game on a series of animated scenes in the hope that some poor sucker is going to buy it as an interactive movie.

The game's 'plot' is simple and straight to the point: no sooner do you get married to your wife, a gang of hardened road hogs murder her. Swearing revenge, you take to the streets in your souped-up sports car and prepare to cleanse the city's roads once and for all.

What this essentially boils down to is some incredibly bland gameplay that results in little more than pressing the appropriate button in time with the relevant on-screen icon. Yes, that's right – this is basically a rehash of *Dragon's Lair* and suffers from exactly the same problems as Don Bluth's over-hyped game.

Sure, the visuals may be reasonably impressive (in that typically grainy Mega CD style) but



LUKE **If ever a game cried out to be bought on the strength of its intro movie, *Road Avenger* would be it. In-your-face J-rock screams along in perfect synergy with the anime action, and as it reaches its inevitable climax you're left positively foaming at the mouth and psyched to play the best racer ever. Unfortunately, *Road Avenger*'s next best trait is its ability to disappoint – the game itself is nothing short of an atrocity and if even tunes of this 'amps to 11' calibre can't save the horribly simple 'gameplay' then I'm not sure anything can. Don't let the soundtrack fool you, people… no matter what some people may say, this game certainly does not rock.**

In Retrospect

As with many Mega CD titles, the years have not been kind to *Road Avenger* – all they've done is make us realise how poor the majority of SEGA's FMV titles really were. This particular style of gameplay may make the perfect mini-game for titles like *Shenmue*, but a whole game simply stretches the concept too far.

In Retrospect

Devil Crash **is still one of our favourite pinball games – its unique style and great soundtrack have served it well. Although it looks a little raw by today's standards and lacks many of the features you'd expect, its distinct look and great tables make up for that.**

tune and will compel you to rack up even greater scores to impress your friends.

Forget the high import price – *Devil Crash* is a superb title and one of the best pinball games we've ever played. Even if you've never played *Alien Crush*, you'll be instantly impressed by *Devil Crash*'s addictive gameplay and exhilarating action. Oh, and that music…

Presentation:	**86%**
Graphics:	**88%**
Sound:	**90%**
Gameplay	**89%**
Lifespan	**94%**
OVERALL	**91%**

we want more from a game than just pressing a button at the right moment. Time your presses correctly and you'll continue to watch the on-screen action; fail and you'll be treated to a cut-scene of your car getting destroyed in a multitude of ways. It's entertaining for about 10 minutes, but you'll find yourself completing Wolfteam's latest effort in a matter of hours.

Some may well love the rocking soundtrack, but no matter which way you look at it, *Road Avenger* is little more than an extremely average gaming experience. With any luck, developers will actually start making some decent use of SEGA's new console…

Presentation:	**72%**
Graphics:	**78%**
Sound:	**84%**
Gameplay	**44%**
Lifespan	**36%**
OVERALL	**51%**

SPACE HARRIER

Format: Arcade
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: SEGA
Release: 1985
Price: 10 pence per play

If you want an exhilarating arcade experience, you can always trust SEGA to come up with the goods. With *Space Harrier*, however, it has raised its game considerably and delivered quite frankly one of the most enjoyable arcade blasters we've played for ages.

Taking place in the gloriously coloured Fantasy Zone, *Space Harrier* sees you equipped with a huge rocket and flying through all sorts of tricky terrain. Using brand new technology that enables up to 128 sprites to appear on screen at once, *Space Harrier* looks simply breathtaking. Needless to say, with so many sprites on display the gameplay becomes incredibly hectic and you have to constantly move around in order to avoid the many objects and enemies.

At the end of each stage, you're greeted with some amazing-looking bosses that range from massive, two-headed dragons to gigantic, missile-spitting robots and each one takes huge amounts of firepower to destroy. SEGA has really gone out of its way to ensure that playing Yu Suzuki's *Space Harrier* is an unforgettable experience.

As well as stand-up and fixed, sit-down cabinets, there's also a hydraulic monstrosity that is absolutely amazing to play on. Sit down, strap yourself in and prepare for one hell of a bumpy ride as the cabinet responds to every movement your on-screen character makes. It really is unbelievable and is well worth the few extra coins you have to pay to play on it.

Boosted by its stunningly fast visuals and some fantastically hummable music, *Space Harrier* is an incredible breath of fresh air and is the perfect way to fritter away a week's pocket money or wages. One day, all arcade games will be like this…

CRITICISM

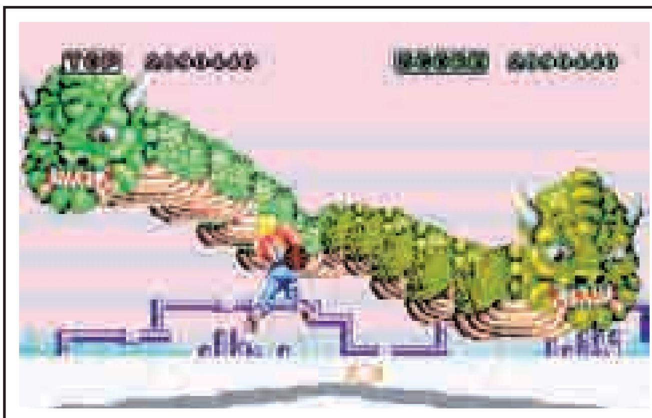
For all its visual and audio splendour though, *Space Harrier* is not the most in-depth game we've ever played and we have to question its long-term appeal. As enemies always directly fire at your last position, it's relatively easy to survive the first few levels unscathed, but before long the pace of the game picks up dramatically and it starts getting incredibly tough. Indeed, *Space Harrier*'s insane speed may actually put some people off, which would be a real shame as they'll be missing out on one of the best blasters around.

RYAN **One analogue stick to move, one button to fire – still tremendous fun. Hurtling through a godly mix of psychedelic visuals and mesmerising gameplay, it's hard for gamers, aesthetes, anyone to resist SEGA's alluring combination. The simplicity of *Space Harrier* will undeniably help it stand the test of time but it's the song that kicks off your 18-mission-long adventure that's really carved a place in my heart. It's the finest music ever to drift from arcade speakers and it belongs to what is, quite possibly, one of the best shoot-'em-ups of all time.**

In Retrospect

Space Harrier **still stands up today as a thoroughly enjoyable (though somewhat shallow) blaster and marked an important turning point for both SEGA and arcade games in general. SEGA's technology was unbelievable for the time and was continually enhanced for the likes of *OutRun* and *Afterburner*. More recently, *Planet Harriers* was released in 2001, revitalising the *Space Harrier* legacy after a whopping 16 year absence.**

Presentation:	**79%**
Graphics:	**95%**
Sound:	**93%**
Gameplay	**88%**
Lifespan	**83%**
OVERALL	**88%**



▲ Our hero was suddenly reminded that he needed to buy a birthday card for the wife's mother…

DAN PHILLIPS



These days, Dan Phillips is better known for his work with Sony's EyeToy, but many retro gamers fondly remember him as the man behind one of the Commodore 64's most influential shooters…

interviewed by DARRAN JONES

Ask any Commodore 64 owners what their favourite shoot-'em-up was and you can pretty much guarantee that Thalamus' *Armalyte* will almost always feature in their top three. Incredibly influential at the time and getting a vast amount out of the C64's innards, 1988's *Armalyte* was a stunning shooter that marked the arrival of Dan Phillips.

Born in Devon, Phillips' early years sound eerily similar to those of today's programmers who grew up at the same time. "I must have been about 12 when I was first let loose on a BBC," he grins. "Before long, I was quickly creating my own games and demos; my actual training was completely self-taught, although a few friends did help me out." Eager to make a break in the industry, Phillips (and his mates) hassled as many people as they could to ensure that both their faces and their games would be remembered; Phillips even managed an encounter with *Zzap!64* legend Julian Rignall when he was trying to secure a job at Thalamus.

"I remember giving Julian a demo disk at an ECTS and he promised to pass it on to Thalamus," Phillips explains. "Although we didn't hear back from them, we kept pestering Thalamus' Paul Cooper until he said we could help out on the mastering of *Hunter's Moon*. Working through the night, myself and John Kemp put together the code for the end sequence, while Rob Levy took care of the graphics for both the loading screen and the end sequence."

Thanks to their hard work, Phillips and friends finished their section of *Hunter's Moon* on time, and in doing so managed to impress Cooper with their dedication and progress. Soon after, Phillips found himself as lead programmer on *Armalyte* – the sequel to one of the C64's most famous shooters, *Delta*.

In hindsight, Phillips now realises what a monumental task his small team had in front of them. "We were incredibly naïve at the time," he remembers, "but we aimed to make the best horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up that the Commodore 64 had ever seen." However, spirits were dampened considerably when Phillips and his teammates realised what the opposition was up to. "We were quite worried when we first saw screenshots of Imagine's *Salamander* at a computer show," he says. "Fortunately, I think we had the edge in terms of gameplay – we played *Armalyte* so much it was honed to near perfection, and technically we were doing things everyone thought was impossible."

IT'S A BLAST

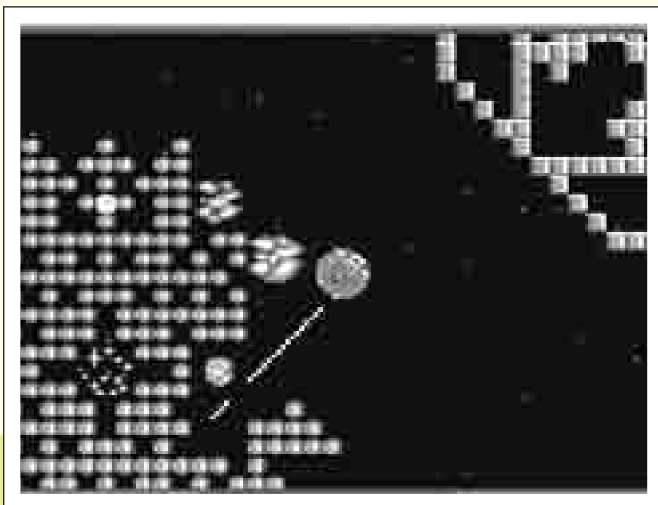
Indeed, you only have to see *Armalyte* in action to realise that Phillips and Levy really knew how to get the most out of the Commodore 64. There were a huge amount of sprites on screen and excited gamers eagerly lapped up the frantic action. Needless to say, a sequel was planned but, as with so many other projects, never actually received a release. "We were made a much better offer by System 3 at the time, and the money we had made from *Armalyte*, coupled with the advance for *Armalyte 2*, was no incentive to stick with it," Phillips explains.

Despite this sad end, *Armalyte 2* does exist, albeit in a rather unfinished form. Head over to the 'Games That Weren't' website (http://homepage.ntlworld.com/frank.gasking) and you'll find all that remains of *Armalyte*'s potentially amazing sequel.

Of course, projects fall by the wayside all the time but, as Phillips explains, that doesn't make the experience any easier. "I found it extremely hard when *Deadlock* [promising C64 shooter] eventually got cancelled," he admits. "It looked wonderful and had some revolutionary ideas, but it was ahead of its time and just wasn't suited to the Commodore 64. Oh, and it was also lacking that basic mechanic that



▲ *Armalyte* – a work of spaceship-shooting brilliance that's widely regarded as a C64 classic. We love it.



▲ *Hunter's Moon* was the title that gave Phillips and his mates their big break in the industry.

screamed 'fun'." In the end, *Deadlock* joined *Armalyte 2*, the *Last Ninja* trilogy for the PlayStation and many other titles that Phillips and Levy were unable to finish due to various commitments. Surprisingly, though, we may not have seen the last of either *Armalyte* or its sequel. "If I had the time, or a small team to command, then finishing *Armalyte 2* would be a possibility," Phillips says. "I've still got the code for *Armalyte* and have had a version working on the GBA already, so you never know – maybe there will be a twentieth anniversary version."

When 8-bit games were all but finished, Phillips moved over to 16-bit computers and consoles – taking the role of lead programmer on many titles – but didn't find the transition to his liking. "I can't really say I enjoyed working on any of them," he reveals. "Saying that, though, working at System 3 during *Putty* was a bit of a hoot." Phillips also had to deal with the frustrations associated with working on a major franchise (in this case *Batman Forever* and *The Incredible Hulk* for Probe). "It was awful," he reminisces. "We were confused game designers working with publishers who thought just having the name meant the game would sell and, as a result, they didn't care about the quality." Nowadays, Phillips is working for Sony Computer Entertainment Europe and leads the EyeToy Technology group. "I'd really like to help make some more stunning use of the little camera," he says.

EYE ON THE FUTURE

Phillips does feel that the industry is markedly different to when he first set out – but not necessarily better. "In my mind, the industry has changed immensely," he laments. "The opportunities for making fun new games has been lost, the teams have become too big and all but first-party publishers are too scared to back anything slightly dangerous." Nevertheless, Phillips is happy to continue working on exciting new projects (although he can't reveal what they are), and despite once planning a career change – he considered running a country pub – he's now content to stay where he is.

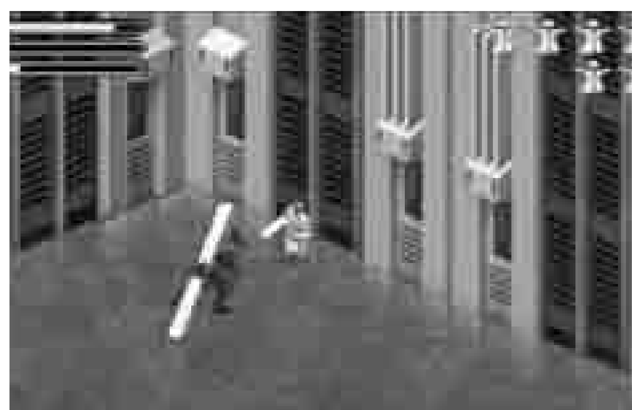
As for today's upcoming developers and programmers, Phillips' advice is simple: "Make your own games," he urges. "Nothing is more impressive than getting a good CV with a CD that has a complete game – it shouts out the qualities that are really needed and it'll tell you whether you're really cut out for the job at hand." Failing that, you could always pick up where Phillips left off on *Armalyte 2* – we'd love to see a finished version.



▲ *Batman Forever* was not a happy time for Phillips, as working on a licence proved to be frustrating…

SOFTOGRAPHY

- Hunter's Moon – C64 (Thalamus, 1987)
- Armalyte – C64 (Thalamus, 1988)
- Deadlock – C64 (System 3, 1989)
- The Last Ninja 3 – C64 (System 3, 1991)
- Silly Putty – Amiga (System 3, 1992)
- The Incredible Hulk – SNES (Probe, 1994)
- Batman Forever – SNES (Probe, 1996)
- Mutant Chronicles – PSone (Acclaim, 1996)
- Forsaken – PC (Acclaim, 1998)
- Ferrari 360/F1 – PC/PS2 (Acclaim, 1999-2000)
- Hot Wheels – PC/PS2 (HotGen, 2000-1)
- Jedi Power Battles – GBA (HotGen, 2002)
- World's Scariest Police Chases 2 – PS2/GC/Xbox (HotGen, 2001-3)





Retro Contact

Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

AIRS AND GRACES

Dear games™

I was watching *Will And Grace* on Channel 4 this morning and inside the first ten minutes of the episode called 'Three's a Crowd, Six is a Freak Show' I spotted the toy shop Grace was in had a massive Dreamcast display. Us Brits may not have noticed as the packaging in the US is black with a red swirl, not the blue colour scheme we have over here. The display is most noticeable when Grace goes over to check a mole on her face in a child's mirror. The display takes up about half the left hand side of the screen.

Russ Thornewill, via email

■ Cheers for that, Russ; your eagle-eyed fanatacism is very impressive. But do you remember the episode with Jack leaping around on a *Dancing Stage* machine in an arcade? We do. Er, we mean, someone told us about it. Yes, that's right… Damn.

WHEN IS RETRO NOT RETRO?

Dear games™

I'm a huge fan of your magazine and buy it every month, with my favourite section being Retro. I can't help noticing, however, that you've yet to cover the Dreamcast or PlayStation as classic machines. Is there any particular reason for this, especially as the PlayStation is nearly ten years old now?

Graeme Parker, Swansea

■ To be honest, it really comes down to your definition of what you consider to be a retro game or machine. If you're in your late twenties to early thirties, you'll consider a retro machine to be anything from the 8- and 16-bit era and before. Conversely, a teenager or someone in their mid-twenties may consider anything up to the PlayStation retro. While the Dreamcast is effectively a dead console in Europe and the US, it regularly gets new games in Japan. The PlayStation, on the other hand, is still selling strongly today, so it's hard to be judged as an old machine. Still, we are aware that many people do want to see both machines (and more game coverage) in future issues, so watch this space.



DAMN AND BLAST

Dear games™

Whatever happened to the traditional scrolling shooter? I have been an avid gamer for about 15 years and enjoy most genres, but I just can't get enough of old-school shooters. These games require great skill and reflexes, can be picked up for ten minutes or an hour, and beating a high score on one credit is total grass-roots gaming. I own quite a few systems, but the ones that get the most attention are my imported Saturn and PC Engine and trusty Dreamcast.

Maybe I'm stuck in my ways and long for the golden days when these types of games were still abundant in arcades and a giant cabinet was not necessary to get people to part with their silver. I just ask one small thing from you – please do a feature sometime on these classics.

Rob D, Nantwich

■ Don't worry, Rob, we're huge fans of 2D shooters and have already started covering them in Retro (check out last month's family tree). Shoot-'em-ups are far from dead, though, and if you look hard you'll find that *Psyvariar 2* and *Shikigami No Shiro 2* are just a few of the titles that have appeared on current consoles. If you're after a great resource site, we recommend www.shmups.com or Destroy All Monsters at www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~bevhome/DAM.htm

THROWAWAY REMARK

Dear games™

First of all, great mag – it's one of the best-made magazines I've seen in a long time. Anyway, I was wondering if you could write a review for a game on the Amiga called *Disposable Hero*. It was a shooter made by Gremlin Graphics and at the time it was great, even if few people bought it (must have been the box art).

If you could write one, I would be extremely grateful. If not, that's fine, I understand you



don't need people like me suggesting ideas how to make a decent magazine when you already have one. Keep up the good work,
Lee Johnway, via email

■ Thanks for the kind words, Lee. As for your request, anything is possible. We're always looking for something a bit different in the retro section and *Disposable Hero* sounds like the ideal candidate for the 'Games That Time Forgot' section. We're always happy to take requests for any games to go in the Retro section. so let us know what you want to see.

AWOOGA!

Dear games™
I was reading your Retro section the other day and noticed that in issue 18 in the 1988 advert for *Barbarian II: The Dungeon Of Drax*, the male barbarian is none other than TV's Wolf from *Gladiators*. Made me chuckle for a bit.
Ben Wood, London

P.S. I also thought *Granny's Garden* on the BBC Micro was one of the most warped games I have ever played. Barmy.

■ You're quite right, Ben, that is indeed Wolf from *Gladiators* (who also modelled for the original *Barbarian* game). Still, he's not the only celebrity to feature in that advert; his buxom companion is none other than former page 3 girl Maria Whittaker. Of course, we only know that because our interest in retro matters stretches beyond gaming to, er, ample-charmed tabloid lovelies.

STAR LETTER ■ STAR LETTER

Dear games™
The news in issue 17 that Sony won't be giving the go ahead for SNK to release *Metal Slug 3* on the PS2 in America was a real shock. Gameplay makes or breaks a game and *Metal Slug 3* scores highly in that area, so why couldn't Sony simply allow it through? I bet it would have sold like hot cakes if it was released on budget and I think Sony has made a big mistake by not giving this game the go ahead.

So what if it's in 2D and doesn't have any fancy, next-generation 3D graphics? If Sony America cannot see great gameplay when it's right in front of it, then there's clearly something wrong with the company. I do feel sorry for our American cousins not getting this excellent game, but what of a UK release for a *Metal Slug 3*?
Daniel Heath, via email

■ It's a sad state of affairs, but 2D titles generally sell very poorly, so it's unsurprising that Sony rejected this great game. Fortunately, *Metal Slug 3* will be appearing on the Xbox with all-new features and Live-enabled scoreboards, while *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos* will also be going online as an Xbox exclusive. You'll also be pleased to hear that both the PS2 and Xbox will be getting SNK double packs: *Metal Slug 4 & 5 Combo* and *King Of Fighters 2002 & 2003* will all be available fairly soon. In the meantime, have some retro kit for your trouble…

IT'S A PRIEST THING

Dear games™
For your information, the *Street Fighter* game Dougal and Father Lennon are playing (Star Games, issue 17) is on the Amiga 500 not, as Brenton suggested, some sort of Capcom code (Retro Contact, issue 18) – that's why they used the joysticks, it's a dead giveaway!
Michael Carrig, via email

■ We're sorry, Michael, but it's definitely not from the Amiga 500 – the background of Ryu's stage is completely different in that version. Dougal and Damo may well be using joysticks but as it's probably stock footage that's being shown, it's highly unlikely that the joysticks were even plugged in. We agree that Brenton's idea (that unused Capcom code found its way onto *Father Ted*) is rather unlikely, but it's the closest we've come to an explanation…



TOTALLY SWEET

Dear games™
You forgot to mention the best site in the world about ninjas in your article (issue 18): www.realultimatepower.net
Jason Loader, via email

■ Thanks, Jason. We always knew that ninjas loved to flip out and kill people. And wail.



Retro Contact is sponsored by Joystick Junkies. Each month's Star Letter will win its author an item of retro gaming clothing of their choice worth up to £20.

Retro

C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

MACHINE OF THE MONTH



- **NAME:** Mega CD
- **PRICE:** £40-60 with games
- **THREE OF THE BEST:**
  Thunderhawk (est. price £17)
  Final Fight CD (est. price £25)
  Shining Force CD (est. price £30)
- Many saw it as a pointless add-on, but the Mega CD was an important evolutionary step for games and had some great titles.

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£20-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

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Contact us in the same way as above stating what items you want and any preferences on condition or price.

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This service is for private sellers, not dealers. Retro items only (nothing post-Dreamcast). No Mega Drive *FIFA* games – everyone has at least two. Highbury Entertainment Ltd cannot take responsibility for items lost or broken in the post.

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GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.

FOR SALE

LOT 69 – *Harvest Moon* for Game Boy Color. Like new. £16. Bucks.

LOT 70 – *R-Type DX* for Game Boy Color. Like new. £16. Bucks.

LOT 72 – *Aladdin* for Mega Drive. Very good condition. £10. Bucks.

LOT 73 – *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker* for Mega Drive. Very good condition. £10. Bucks.

LOT 75 – *Yu Suzuki Gameworks* book with Dreamcast disc of six classic arcade titles, including *OutRun, After Burner* etc. Mint condition. £50. Wilts.

LOT 80 – *Soukyugurentai* (black cover, Japanese version) for SEGA Saturn. Good condition with box and instructions. £35 plus p+p. North Yorks.

LOT 81 – Unboxed Pikachu Nintendo 64 with five games – *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time, Turok: Dinosaur Hunter, Pokémon Snap, Pokémon Stadium 2* and *Mario Tennis*. All in excellent condition apart from *Turok* box. All manuals included. Good working order. £40. Glasgow.

LOT 82 – TV Tuner for SEGA Game Gear. Unboxed but in good condition. £25 plus p+p. Glasgow.

LOT 84 – *Blue Lightning* for Atari Lynx, decent condition. £18. Suffolk.

LOT 86 – *Radiant Silvergun* for Japanese Saturn. Mint condition, includes spine card. £180. Salisbury.

LOT 86 – N64 with 12 games including *Clay Fighters, Turok, Pokémon Snap, Conker's Bad Fur Day* and *GoldenEye*. All games are cartridges only and there is no box for the console. £100. Blackpool.

LOT 87 – Three SEGA Saturn shooters – *Detana Twin Bee Yahoo, Shienryu* and Capcom's *1942* collection. All games are Japanese and in decent condition, but without spine cards. £80 for the lot. Bridport.

LOT 88 – *Sabre Wulf* for the Spectrum. No box or instructions, but the game does work. £2.50.

LOT 89 – Amiga 500 with 20 games including *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis, Stunt Car Racer, Zool, The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Eye Of The Beholder*. Comes with all relevant leads and is perfect for a beginner. £120. Southampton.

LOT 90 – Neo-Geo AES with two joysticks, a memory card and 11 great games including *Metal Slug 3* and *4, SNK Vs Capcom Chaos, Matrimelee, Fatal Fury Special* and *Alpha Mission* (games are Japanese and English, contact for further details). This is a great intro to the ultimate games console and I will consider splitting. £1,000 ONO. Contact Shane Freeman at shamus1roks@yahoo.co.uk

FOR SALE - LOT 91
SAMBA DE AMIGO
and maracas for the Dreamcast (PAL). Great condition and well looked after. Yours for only £70. Suffolk.

Best Buy

WANTED

WANTED 34 – *Disc World* for PlayStation. Must be complete and in good condition. Gloucester.

WANTED 35 – *King Of Fighters 2001* or *2002* for Neo Geo AES. Must be boxed with manual. Good price paid. Derbyshire.

WANTED 36 – Commodore 64 and any games published by either Hewson or 21st Century Entertainment. Manchester.

WANTED 38 – *Mean Machines* magazines. Any issues, but not 3, 14, 15 or 19. Must be in good condition. Price negotiable. London.

WANTED 41 – SEGA 32X. Must be in good working order. Will pay up to £40. Cambridgeshire.

WANTED 42 – *Knuckles Chaotix* for SEGA 32X. Must be in good working order. Will pay up to £15. Cambridgeshire.

WANTED 44 – *Sonic CD* for SEGA Mega CD. Will pay up to £30.

WANTED 45 – PC Engine GT Must be in excellent condition, with good sound and no dead pixels. Will pay good money for boxed machine and games. Bournemouth.

WANTED 46 – *Metal Slug* for Neo-Geo AES. Will pay reasonable price if in good condition. Essex.

WANTED 47 – *Illbleed* for SEGA Dreamcast. Any version, good price paid. Contact Andrew Hulme at ashulme1983@hotmail.com

WANTED 48 – *Bug* or *Bug Too* for SEGA Saturn (PAL version only) in working condition. Please contact Mark Wales at crazy-yak@think-yak.com

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NEXT MONTH IN RETRO

PLUS

- *Radiant Silvergun*: Really the best shoot-'em-up ever made?
- *Rise Of The Robots*: Yes, it's still just as bad as you remember
- Classic machine: Atari's Lynx

If you thought this month's Retro section was jam-packed with vintage gaming goodness, wait until you see what we've got in store for issue 21. More Games That Time Forgot, a look back at the handheld Atari Lynx, more retro reviews, more Great Game Bosses… well, more of everything, really.

See you then!!!

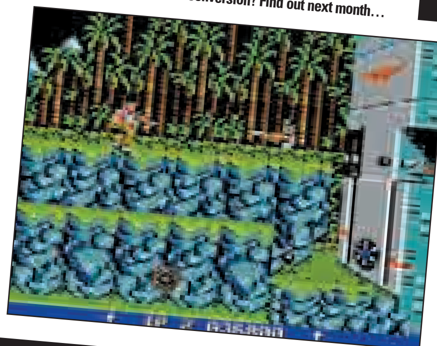
Get to meet Benny Hill's greatest enemy. Oh no! It's the missus!

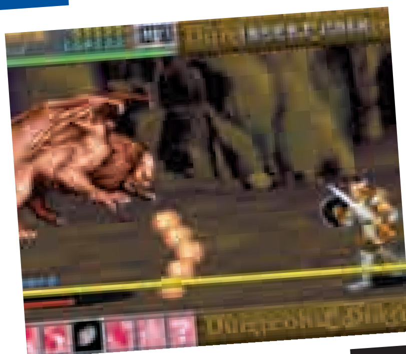






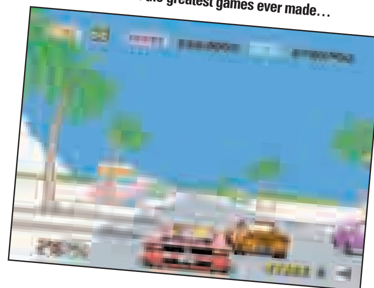
A great arcade game – but which home system had the best conversion? Find out next month…





Love them or loathe them, you can't beat a scrolling beat-'em-up. Well, you *can* beat them, but not like that.

With the sequel around the corner, we take a look at one of the greatest games ever made…



ON SALE JULY 15


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

VIEWPOINT

KATAMARI DAMASHII

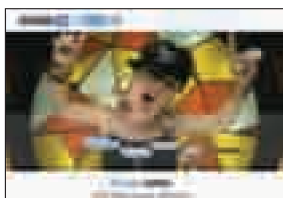
To be brutally honest, we're gutted that this has virtually no chance of appearing outside Japan – after all, it's simple games like this that are often the most fun to play. If you've got an imported PS2 there's no excuse not to buy this right now.



VIEWPOINT

SINGSTAR

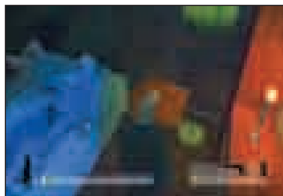
Karaoke games might not be everyone's cup of tea, but at least Sony has the right idea. With its selection of licensed tracks, official videos and all-round polished presentation, the combination of *SingStar* and an EyeToy makes for a great night in.



VIEWPOINT

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

Cheeky though it may be for IO Interactive to have filled its latest *Hitman* effort with levels from the original PC game (albeit in a slightly tweaked form), that doesn't stop *Contracts* from being probably the most enjoyable game in the series so far.



PLAYSTATION2

MANUFACTURER Sony **UK LAUNCH DATE** 24 November 2000 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £139.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

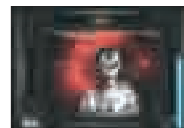
TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The two games that pretty much put the PS2 where it is
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so-enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House	Old-school shooting has never been so much fun
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House	If you only own one football game, it should be this
Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Rez	SEGA	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House	Konami's RPG series is still as good as it ever was
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

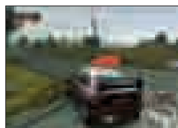
Project Zero

The original still stands out as a perfect example of how survival horror games can be genuinely scary.



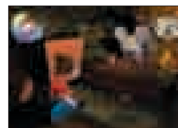
Colin McRae Rally 04

Perhaps not the huge leap forward it could have been, but still a defining moment in rally games.



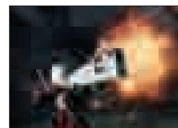
Gregory Horror Show

Capcom's bizarre cartoon-based adventure is great fun, though getting hold of it might not be easy.



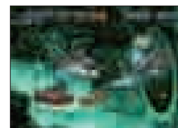
Devil May Cry

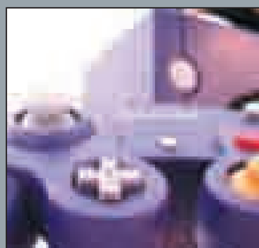
The PAL version suffers horribly from borders and slowdown, but this is still one of Capcom's best.

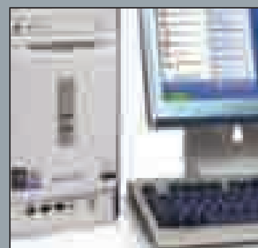


Metal Slug 3

One for import gamers only, which is a real shame. As far as side-scrolling 2D blasters go, this is brilliant.

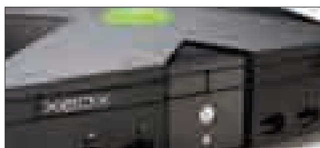


XBOX

MANUFACTURER Microsoft **UK LAUNCH DATE** 13 March 2002 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £129.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs.

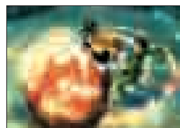
TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade flavour
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xboxes
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a title
Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit	Classic shoot-'em-up action, the SEGA way
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	Redefining how we play games online
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	In-House	Fairly decent action-strategy that comes alive online
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

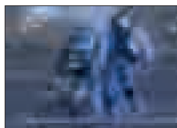
Beyond Good & Evil

We couldn't be more upset that this was mostly ignored – especially since it means there'll be no sequel.



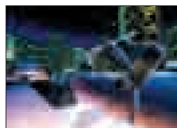
Ninja Gaiden

Minus the decapitations, but still a fantastic ninja-slaying romp that shows what the Xbox can do.



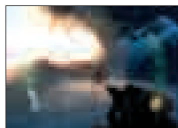
SSX 3

With tons of missions and a massive mountain to explore, *SSX3* is rather good. Shame it's not online…



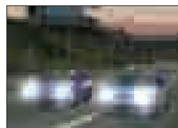
Deus Ex: Invisible War

Perhaps too basic for fans of the series, but it still stands out as a great title for Xbox adventure fans.



Burnout 2: Point Of Impact

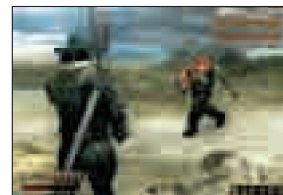
As fast as it is beautiful, Acclaim's last dance with the *Burnout* series is still loads of fun to play.



VIEWPOINT

RED DEAD REVOLVER

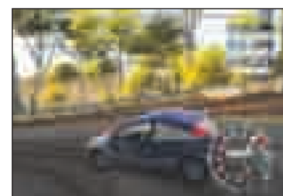
If ever a game managed to capture a genre perfectly, it's Rockstar's venture into the Wild West. Every aspect screams Spaghetti Western but, thankfully, the game's loads of fun as well. A great return to form for the developer that *GTA* built…



VIEWPOINT

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

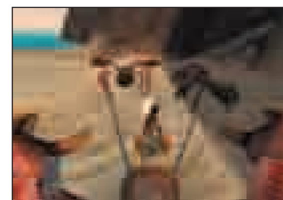
Could we have received more flak for championing this racing marvel over Codemasters' *TOCA Race Driver 2*? Probably not – but that doesn't stop us from holding firm and saying once more that this is the one to go for.



VIEWPOINT

GALLEON

Proof that waiting ages for a game doesn't always mean it's going to be solid gold. As much as we wanted Toby Gard's long-awaited pirate adventure to be amazing, we ended up wondering exactly what all the fuss was about. Damn shame.



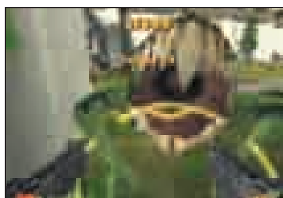
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

VIEWPOINT

SERIOUS SAM: NEXT ENCOUNTER

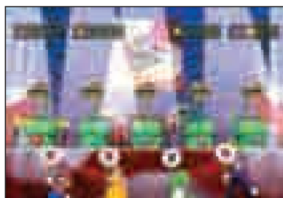
It might not be the most cerebral game around, but that doesn't stop the recent GameCube version of *Serious Sam* from being a good laugh – especially if you've got a friend to plough through Co-op mode with you.



VIEWPOINT

MARIO PARTY 5

Damn you, Nintendo – just when we thought we'd got a weekend to ourselves, along came a night in with loads of friends, several alcoholic beverages and a copy of *Mario Party 5*. One day we're going to hold you accountable for all those hours we've lost.



VIEWPOINT

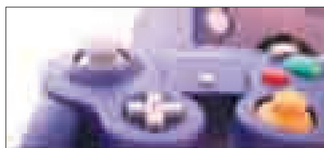
MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

It's about bloody time. Japan and the US have been enjoying the GameCube and GBA versions of *Mario Golf* for ages now, but now it's our turn (for the Cube game, at least – GBA owners will have to wait until September).



GAMECUBE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 3 May 2002 **MEDIA** 3-inch Optical Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

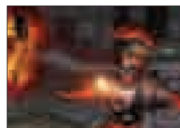
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1080° Avalanche	Nintendo	In-House	A markedly different game to the competition
Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	Square-Enix	Different from the norm, with a distinct multiplayer flavour
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	SEGA does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	Silicon Knights	Hardly innovative, but still a great game in its own right
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House	An interesting twist on the *Resident Evil* franchise
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5	Forget the follow-up – the original still has the edge
Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$ IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

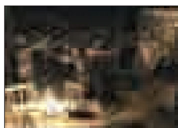
Eternal Darkness

Scary as hell, but for completely different reasons than the survival horror games you're used to.



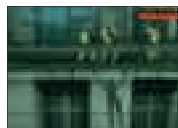
Resident Evil Zero

Traditional Capcom scare fodder that still manages to capture the imagination. And it's damn tough too.



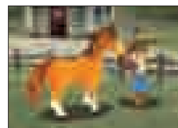
MGS: The Twin Snakes

Slightly more than just your average remake, but it still proves that a great game doesn't go bad over time.



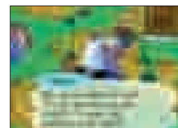
Harvest Moon

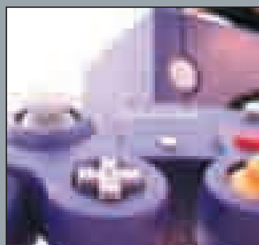
The only title that makes farming look like a viable career and offers a great experience to boot.

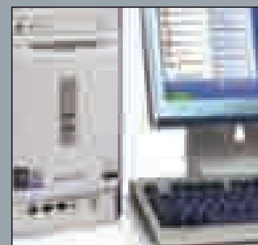


Animal Crossing

The game that'll consume your life instantly. If an online version ever comes out, we'll never go outside.



GBA

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 22 June 2001
MEDIA Flash Cartridge **CURRENT PRICE** £89.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is also available now in a variety of colours.

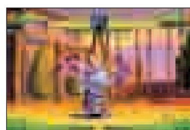
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	In-House
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square-Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubisoft	Binary 9
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	SEGA
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Super Mario Advance 4: SMB 3	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Yu-Gi-Oh!: World Championship 2004	Konami	In-House
Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Street Fighter Alpha 3

Who'd have thought that such a comprehensive version of our favourite *Alpha* title could fit onto a GBA cartridge?



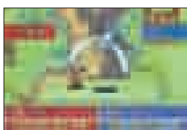
Metroid: Zero Mission

It might have been touted as a remake of the original NES title, but it feels like a completely new game to us.



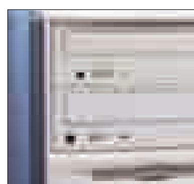
Fire Emblem

We've lost countless hours with Nintendo's GBA take on its classic series; now it's out in the UK, you can too.



PC

MANUFACTURER N/A **UK LAUNCH DATE** N/A
MEDIA 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
Day of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
System Shock	EA	Looking Glass Games
The Sims	EA	Maxis
TRON 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

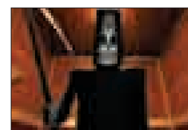
Medieval: Total War

So good they made a TV show out of it. If watching troops maim each other is your thing, this is ideal for you.



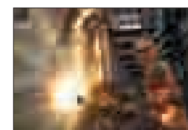
Grim Fandango

Another of LucasArt's best point-and-click adventures, from the days before the rot set it. What went wrong, eh?



Unreal Tournament 2004

Hardly revolutionary as far as the series goes, but it still manages to best most of the competition for the top spot.




FINAL FANTASY XII
Square Enix has finally revealed the next game in the greatest RPG series ever – but will the changes be what the fans really want? We aim to find out...
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PAGES OF FANTASTICAL GAMING GREATNESS

NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

Don't expect us to spend much time in the office next month – we'll be too busy travelling the globe and seeing all the latest games, just so we can tell you all about them.

MORE… REVIEWS

Who needs to go outside? With games like *Driv3r*, *Shellshock: Nam '67*, *Athens 2004*, *Joint Operations* and *Mashed* to entertain you, the sunshine can wait for all we care.

MORE… FEATURES

Free Radical Design finally lets us behind closed doors to discover the secrets of its success; the subject of real-life robots taking over the world scares us silly; and we explore the Scottish Highlands for signs of arcade life – does it really still exist?

'04

Please note: Due to late code and unforeseen circumstances and stuff, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it, like words and pictures and what have you.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

THE NEXT FOUR PAGES ARE YOURS AS WE TAKE A BACK SEAT FOR A WHILE. THE RESULTS ARE, AS ALWAYS, AN INTERESTING MIX OF INSIGHTFUL VIEWS AND OLD-FASHIONED FANBOYISM



Some big trade show or other, the roar of the dinosaur and the fact that someone from Nokia has rather outmoded views about women gamers (allegedly) – these are the hot topics round here.

MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™
Highbury Entertainment
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you've bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the 'forum' icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

Step Three:
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**Angels**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

EVER WONDERED WHERE all the female gamers are? Ever considered what pushed us away? Let me explain… I recently attended a videogames masterclass evening in order to find out how to get into the games industry. I have a background which I thought would be a suitable basis for that kind of work – I have a degree in computer science, and a love of gaming that started when I was just seven years old. But apparently that's not enough; I also need a sex change. You see, I'm female and, quite clearly, as an industry you're still not ready for women.

Attending the event was a representative from Nokia. Someone asked what he thought about women in the industry; he replied that women don't like games as they can't concentrate on them because they are too busy thinking about stuff like what to cook for tea. I wish I was joking, but he actually said that. What followed was a discussion from the panel about how to 'pinkify' games for girls and turn Tom Clancy into Jackie Collins. Not for a single minute did anyone consider that, just maybe, women might like other types of games.

Apparently my love of *Ghost Recon*, *Serious Sam* and other FPSs clearly wasn't normal, and I should hang up my joypads now, buy a pink dress and do some housework instead. I spent the entire evening feeling angry, upset and out of place.

As for working in the industry? You'd have to be kidding me; I have no intention of spending every working day from here to retirement explaining that I am some alien creature who genuinely loves gaming. Why would anyone want to work in an industry with such pathetic and outdated views like that? Perhaps when attitudes within the industry reach the 21st Century, the number of female gamers and developers will increase.
Lis Ries

games™: So the comments of one moron have tainted your view of the entire industry? Sadly, in any walk of life you will always find people who hold outdated views that others may find offensive and it's up to all of us to challenge them whenever and wherever we find them. Yes, the gaming industry is largely run by blokes for a male market – it always has been. While this isn't particularly satisfactory, we'd suggest that you continue to pursue a career in videogames as you'll find that most people you'll meet will share your love of the subject matter and that's what counts. And besides, if all female gamers decided not to enter the industry because of one guy's thoughtless comment, no progress would ever get made.

IN RECENT ISSUES of **games™** a lot of focus has been given to the forthcoming next steps in console gaming such as the PS3, XNA and the N5, plus the many new handheld devices scheduled for release. However, the Apex Digital ApeXtreme hasn't featured anywhere at all. According to Apex Digital, the release date has now been put back and is now scheduled for a summer 2004 launch.

Surely a home entertainment system with many hundreds of games available on release day is worth a mention – even if it does seem to have a larger footprint than the Xbox.
Steve Clark

SMS TEXT

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07970 043498



Are unlockable levels a fair test of skill and perseverance, or just a frustrating flaw?



games™: Okay, so it might have slipped under our radar, but it's not exactly going to change the videogaming landscape, is it? We'll try and get hold of one soon as it'll no doubt be something of a collector's item in the not too distant future. And you, er, don't work for Apex Digital, do you?

☐ **HOW OFTEN DO** we buy something only to be told we're not able to use 70 per cent of it? If we spend £10 on a CD by our favourite band are we told we can only play tracks 1 to 3, then, over a few weeks, we can gradually access all listed tracks? And only when we can sing the lyrics backwards can we unlock a further three bonus tracks?

So why, after spending £40 on a videogame that boasts 30 tracks, multiple game modes, numerous playable characters and vehicles, can we not access them immediately if we want to? I am okay at gaming and, given time, am normally able to get through the various levels to open up the rest of the game modes. My son, however, is relatively new to the scene at five years old and cannot understand why he can't just have a try at any level, track, or vehicle he wants and has to wait for me to play and unlock the next bit.

I realise that these 'bonus' levels and modes are there to reward good play, persistence and to give gamers something to aim for so that we are able to proudly boast that we've now got access to the most powerful car in the game whilst our friends are still plodding around in a Trabant. But I still can't help wondering why I've got to earn the right to choose any car, track, level or character within the game. Would game publishers prefer it if I paid them £5 now and further instalments as I unlocked more of the game?

I know that it may not make sense to head straight for the end of a story before reading through the beginning and middle, but if I've paid for the story I should have the choice. When readers buy your magazine, how many flick through all the pages first to check out what's inside and then head for the article that takes their fancy? Or do we all read the pages comprehensively and in strict numerical order, not allowing ourselves to read page ten before we've read pages one to nine?

John Glaves

games™: But that's how games work, isn't it? If every track in *Project Gotham Racing 2* was available from the off there'd be no incentive to keep at it, and it's hardly as if there isn't enough in the game to keep everyone happy from the moment you boot it up. Then, of course, there's that little thing called the learning curve. Cars such as the Speed 12 in *PGR2* are virtually impossible to drive if you're uninitiated, and if players jumped straight into such a high-performance vehicle the chances ▷

"PERHAPS WHEN ATTITUDES WITHIN THE GAMES INDUSTRY REACH THE 21ST CENTURY, THE NUMBERS OF FEMALE GAMERS AND DEVELOPERS WILL INCREASE"

CONTACT
ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

TEXT LIFE...

☐ On crossword. Why?
gamesTM: We've just appointed a new Retro Editor, and we felt that the crossword wasn't that popular. Maybe we'll reinstate it in the future.

☐ Is Mortal Kombat Advance 4 the GBA any good?
gamesTM: Most of the time, but every now and again it can be naughty.

☐ ive waited ages for Galleon, and here it is…..Galleon, Haaaa ha haaa ha haaaa ha, ive wet myself.
gamesTM: Don't mock the afflicted.

☐ What in gods name is going on with ur top 20 lists?Is it my imagination or 4 the past 2 mths have they good all random?Please sort this out.Good work though.
gamesTM: They're now in alphabetical order, if that's what you mean. If it's the content you don't like, well, each to their own.

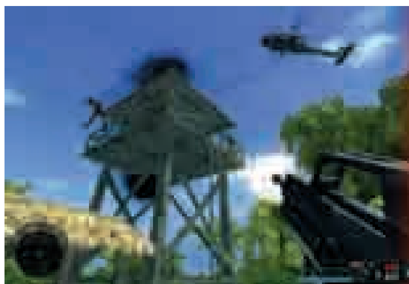
☐ I would like to start off by saying great mag, and would like to ask how you feel about the new Zelda game I think it looks fantastic how about you.
gamesTM: It's going to be superb, just like the many other fine games that were shown at E3.

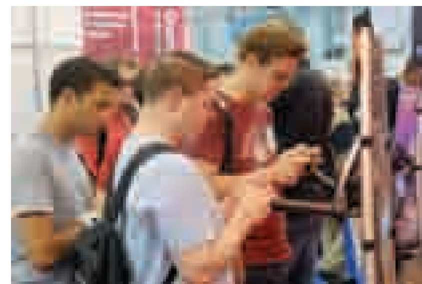
☐ I remember once upon a time when 'bullet time' was called 'slow down'. Do you think they'll come up with new names for spite flicker and choppy frame rates?
gamesTM: And we remember when all round here was fields…

☐ I bought issue 1 of your classy mag off ebay for £15!i hope you're proud of yourselves….
gamesTM: We'd have been even happier if you'd bought it off us for that much.

☐ Do your 24hour timelines allow for sleep and activities other than gaming? Cos it seems implausible that anybody could finish ninja gaiden in 2 days..
gamesTM: Sleeping is for wimps. And what are these 'activities other than gaming', eh?

☐ Can't we just vote in all the awards categories in one text message? Damn 'cheap' way to make money..
gamesTM: We wanted all-in-one voting, seriously. Unfortunately, due to the number of categories and the way that the votes are electronically sorted, we were told it simply isn't possible. Sorry.


Can graphics get any better than *Far Cry*? Well, maybe, but not without countless pricey upgrades, it seems.


Look, everyone – new consoles. What do you mean 'they'll be rubbish'? Come on, a little enthusiasm. Please?

are that they'd assume that the game was unplayable, when it's not. This system might seem unfair to a five year old, but there are plenty of games that are tailored to meet the needs of younger gamers; the games that you have alluded to are, if you don't mind us saying, aimed at an older demographic and are perhaps inappropriate for the very young.

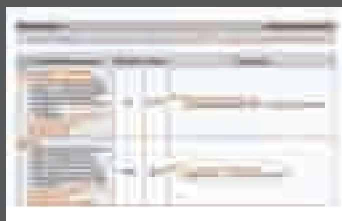
☐ **SO I'M WATCHING** *Far Cry* play itself out on my PC. It's looking as smooth as everyone promised, and so it should; I invested in a RAM upgrade to 1Gb especially for the game. But as I started it up for the first time, I glanced across at my Xbox, PS2 and (tucked away behind a plant) PSone, and started thinking about the power of graphics.

What's been bothering me is how much effort PC game developers put into insisting on upgrades rather than pushing existing technology in order to run games at perfect rates. Consider the PSone. When it launched it was a pretty graphically capable machine. Time went by and things changed. Developers, limited to producing the best games possible without being able to alter the hardware, resorted to stretching the limits of what was technically possible with what they had. Obviously, this could only go so far, but the difference in quality between what was possible when the machine first launched, and what was possible by and after *Metal Gear Solid* is remarkable. The same can be said for the PS2 and even the Xbox.

So are PC game developers trying as hard as their console cousins to squeeze every last drop out of a card before an upgrade is recommended? I know that PC hardware cannot be as standardised as console hardware, but at some point it must be possible to establish a benchmark graphical power level, particularly as the current architectures of high-end graphics cards are not massively different from one another.

Maybe we could make *Far Cry* this benchmark. At this point, new games that are introduced can use as much or as little of this power as their needs demand, but when the next generation of games are being created, developers should look at what has been

"THE AMOUNT OF CRITICISM IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY IS ASTRONOMICALLY HIGH, AND IT OFTEN EVOLVES FROM CYNICISM INTO DOWNRIGHT STUPIDITY"



FROM THE FORUM

DID NINTENDO GET ITS MOJO BACK AT E3?

Mr_Party_Hat
When Epona first galloped onto the side of the huge press-conference screen, you could almost hear the hairs standing up on the backs of people's necks. Fanboys around the world came in their collective Y-fronts and I, without shame, laughed out loud and punched the air in utter joy. No other games company in the world could produce this kind of blind, emotion-driven reaction. But why? After seeing the new Mario DS game, along with the *Legend Of Zelda* video, I couldn't give two flying monkeys how many videos of *Halo 2* or *MGS 3* they show – they just won't have the same impact. How come the (until very recently) falling giant can produce reactions that Sony and Microsoft could only dream of? What is so magically orgasmic about Nintendo?

The Baker
That's the Nintendo difference, that is.

Jetman
I'm also amazed at people's (fanatical?) reactions to Nintendo, although I have to admit I also get stupidly excited at any Nintendo news. Perhaps it's because so many gamers grew up with Nintendo and therefore have some sort of emotional connection with it?

feltmonkey
It has to be that. I have no particular emotional attachment to Nintendo – the GameCube is the first Nintendo console I've owned and my reaction to those shots was 'oh, looks pretty, but I preferred the cel-shaded look'. I'm still much more excited about *Halo 2*.

RetroBob
I'm sure if SEGA actually had some decent news then I'd be as excited as I am about the Nintendo stuff.

Koffdrop
I'm *very* impressed with what Nintendo's doing with the DS and happy to see a new *Zelda* game as all the others have been great. The look doesn't bother me – perhaps a mature Zelda is a reflection of Nintendo maturing. As for the Nintendo fanboys and the GameCube forum already littered with posts like 'DS –best-selling console ever?' I'm truly saddened by the lack of any hint of maturity from your average Nintendo audience. I still have my reservations about Nintendo's business strategies but I have never disputed the quality of its games or its constant innovation in hardware design. I just hope that Nintendo's core audience doesn't suffocate Nintendo's *need* to widen its market share and expand its user demographic. As for 'why can't Sony or Microsoft' get that kind of reaction? I still get chills when I think back to the unveiling of *MGS2* a few years back, and the feeling I got watching the original *Half-Life 2* footage from last year's show was *precisely* the same as the feeling I got when watching the Nintendo press conference. It's moments like those that keep me so keen on videogames.

SuperAl
When Nintendo does it right there is nobody else as good. Nintendo puts magic into its games that nobody else seems to be able to. It brings excitement, anticipation and that special feeling when it shows off new games. However, in recent times, Nintendo hasn't done it all that often, if at all. The Roaring Dinosaur has risen once again.

ApocalypseDude
Watching the new Nintendo videos – and Shigeru prancing around with a sword – made me remember why I love Nintendo so, but the *Halo 2* video elicited the same kind of response, as did the *Doom 3* one. The *Half-Life 2* one, however, looked dull after *Doom* and *Halo 2*.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SO E3 ROLLED around, and thanks to the magical interweb we could see the new games and new technologies almost as soon as they were made public. And thanks to internet forums, we could almost immediately discuss what had been revealed.

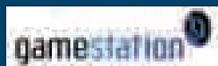
I find it quite odd, however, that everyone is an expert on these new technologies as soon as they have been unveiled. Take, for example, the PSP. In recent months a number of games have been shown to the public. The reaction? Blind cynicism. 'It's just like a PS2', 'the batteries run out after 26 seconds', 'it's bigger than an Xbox' people moan – how, exactly, do they know this?

The amount of criticism in the games industry is astronomically high, and it often evolves from cynicism into stupidity. There is no need to try and kill something off before it has even shown its face. Frankly, I'm surprised that anything sells at all. Ever. Because, as far as I can tell, everyone hates everything, even before it gets released. Even the hallowed *Half-Life 2* isn't safe, as it's been on the receiving end of a fair bit of stick for the number of times that it's been delayed.

Gamers are cynical, idiotic, judgemental, impatient morons. How has this industry survived? Or am I just over-reacting?

Ian Dransfield

gamesTM: Baiting hardware and software on a forum is easy because it's so anonymous, and it's something most industry types are no doubt used to. The saddest part of this is that, in our experience, the people that carp about such things are incredibly passionate about videogames but feel that they have seen everything. It's just a shame that rather than think positively about gaming they'd rather whinge, which is their loss, don't you think?



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting.

introduced and work out how to push the hardware rather than the pockets of the gamer. Not everyone would upgrade their PCs, but hardcore gamers could do so safe in the knowledge that it would be the last upgrade needed for a good while.

I know that this utopia is probably just a pipedream given that, unlike consoles, games are often produced with little or no interaction with hardware manufacturers, but with Nvidia's new quality mark for games that use its technology boosting the number of companies seeking to collaborate with it, surely it's within the realms of possibility?

But as I sit watching the sun glinting so beautifully off the barrel of my M16, I can't help but wonder how long it's going to be until I'm again forced to wander down to PC World so that I can enjoy a game that looks its very best.

Nick Rolfe

gamesTM: The perils of PC ownership, eh? We appreciate that it must be frustrating and expensive to ensure that your PC can play the latest games, but then you pays your money and you takes your chances. It's not that we don't sympathise, but who would decide when an upgrade would be required, and how would this be enforced? The simple answer is that it couldn't, and with PC games developers locked into what seems to amount to a war of technology it's unlikely to change any time soon. Perhaps you're better off sticking to fixed formats such as the Xbox or PlayStation2 for now.

